

人類は衰退しました

7

田中 ロミオ

イラスト / 戸部 淑



GAGAGA

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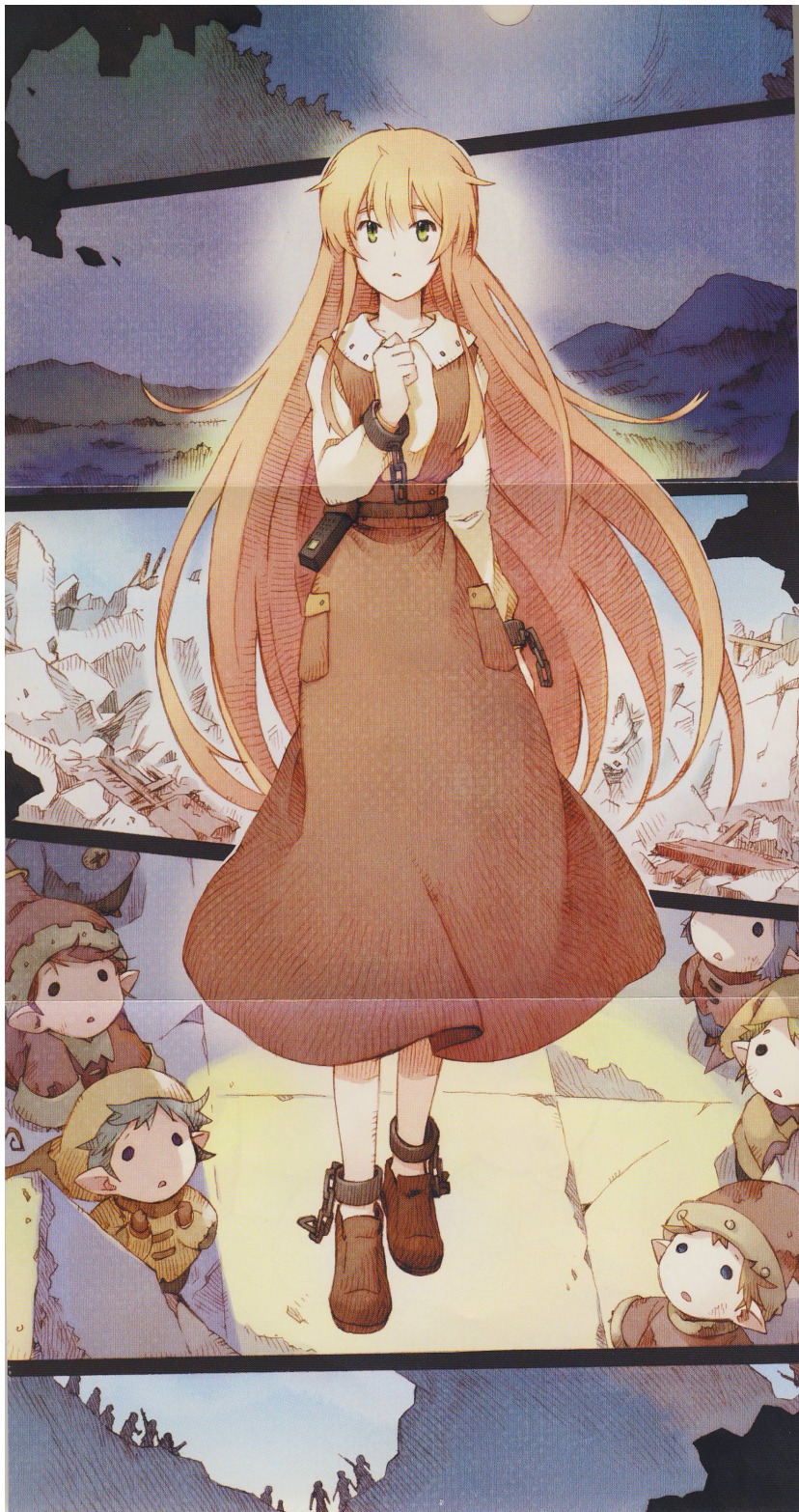
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デザイン／一尾成臣





人類は衰退しました

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MAIN CHARACTERS 主 要 キ ャ ラ ク タ ー

Protagonist (Watashi, "I") Narrator of the story. Mediator of Kusunoki Village. Fairies at present, the people who count as humanity on this Earth. **Grandfather** Protagonist's grandfather. Boss of the Office of Mediation in Kusunoki Village.

Assistant a youth who works as assistant to the Office of Mediation in Kusunoki Village, **Y** a girl the same age as

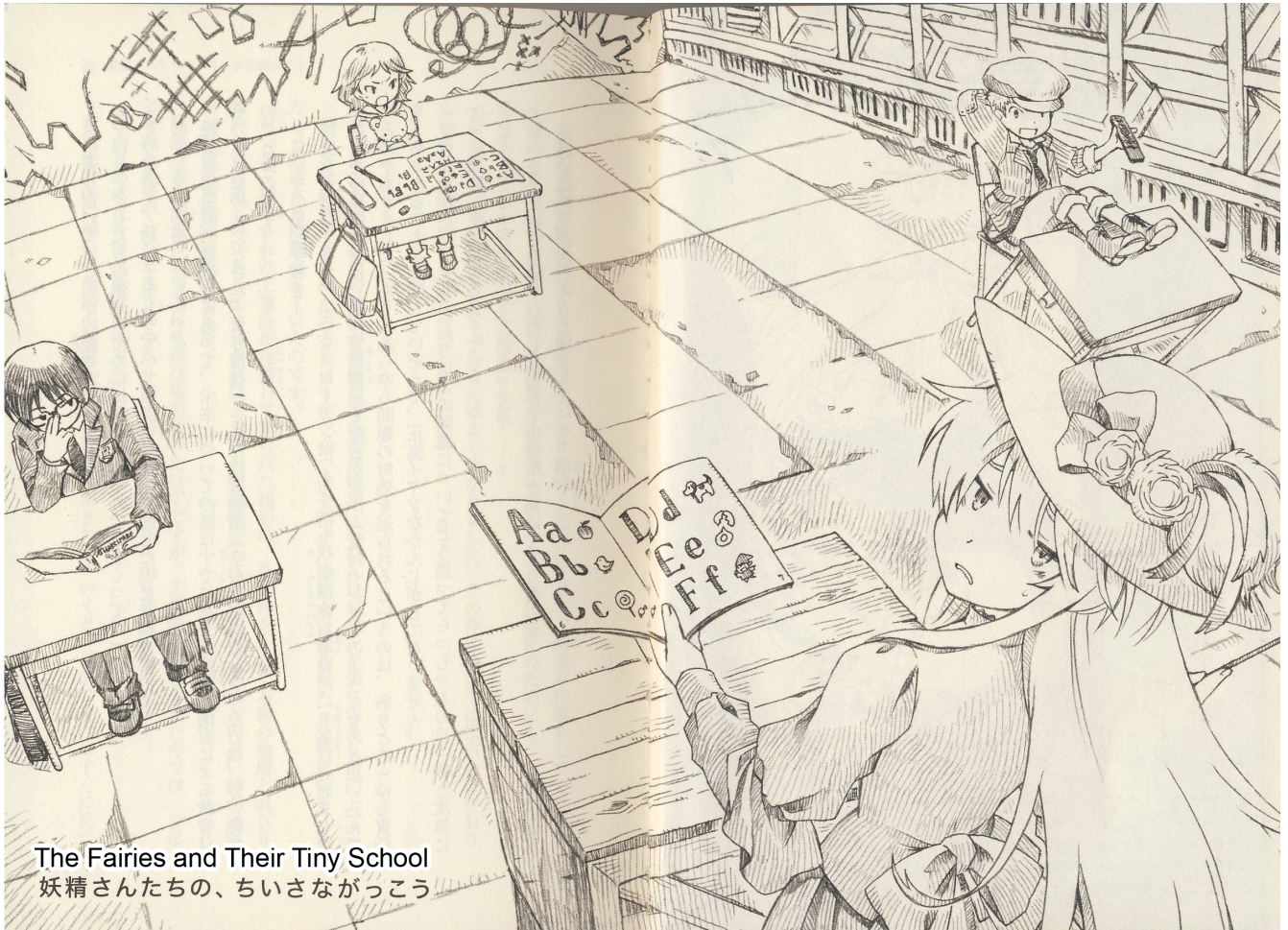
Protagonist. Slender of face and physique, an attractive silver-haired lady. **A** Age 8. A mischievous child. Actually works as a sheep farmer. **B** Age 8. A quiet boy. His family is famous around the land. **C** Age 8. An agreeable girl. Family is of farmers.

K an UN agent dressed in black clothes.

From the Back Cover

Humanity Has Declined 7

Humanity has met with a gradual decline, and for some centuries now. Earth was now the property of the Fairies. Acting as intermediary between said fairies and humans were the international public servants known as Mediators, which was my job. However, lately I had become more of a handler for complaints... *"Let's have a school in Kusunoki!"*, a slogan that reversed my past life and put me in the role of teacher. The three problem children escalated the issue and their parents made me do whatever the trio wanted! There was a storm of pies on the faces of the assistant teachers, and in the end, I went out of control?! Kusunoki Village, destroyed...?!?!



The Fairies and Their Tiny School
妖精さんたちの、ちいさながっこう

Someone said this at a Village assembly.

"Shouldn't we actually have a school for the sake of the future of the children?!"

Every young mother with children agreed with that statement.

There was something odd, as well.

In human society, presently in a well-received decline, every discussion about the past became an argument about the past. Education at a country level was considered to have had its role concluded, and what was said to be the last educational institution in the world, The School, had been closed down just the previous year.

"Let's have a school in Kusunoki!"

It made sense for the people of Kusunoki Village to consider the Office of Mediation as some generalized complaints office. Dealing with any kind of problem seemingly meant having all sorts of responsibility, and I honestly did not like the sound of that.

"Scholar-senseis! What do you think about this problem?! This might get out of hand if you don't do something!"

Why was this our problem now...?

The only good thing that had happened at that point was that I was out of the Office due to having to deal with another matter.

I heard that Grandfather was the one who dealt with this.

Being an expert in life, Grandfather had turned into a complete hobbyist of late, which meant he did not work much. Still, he was forced to sit up straight for this one. Older people should get a move on every once in a while, or so I thought.

"I see, I get what you mean. There's people in charge of that matter, so I'd prefer to leave her in charge of everything."

At the same time as that explosive if odd outburst of wholesale delegation to subordinates that knew neither blood nor tears, I was at a mountain of junk.

Once it had been all rusty, but at this point around seventy percent this hilly area was covered by green and earth, and that was where Assistant-san and I were carrying out our inspection. Long ago, this landmass created by piles of abandoned industrial products had little by little mixed with actual soil strata and was sinking into the ground. That made it clear how a tremendous amount of time had passed by this pile of machines.

"I am sure it was set up here..."

I checked the map that I had used the last time I had come here as I waded through vines, quickly spotting what I was looking for.

"It is all black, I see. Time to replace it."

Assistant-san still had his rucksack on his back as he climbed up the incline.

I pulled open the lid and took out an empty can from the case of this electrical machine that was now turning into an inclined hollow.

It was a black box—

To classify it, it was a Fairy Tool.

Assistant-san came up to me and stared at the black box with curiosity.

It was the first time he had seen this.

"When I last examined it it was still blackish, but now has become pitch black. This has concentrated a fair bit, I see."

I held it out to the sun, but it was not transparent at all. It was hard to express how it was coated, it was a perfect black that felt like it was carved out from the deepest seas.

That meant that the light that hit the black box was completely absorbed by it.

"..."

Assistant-san did like me and tried to see through the black box by holding it out to the sun. It was a very peaceful moment.

Dragged along by his gaze, I also looked up at the blue sky.

We were, right then and there, standing over fairies.

According to the statement of G-san (68), resident of Kusunoki Village—

"That was some really odd scene. It was, right, like lots of machines skittering about. There was some oven-like thing and some lamppost-like thing fidgeting about, it was seriously creepy. And then I just up and ran away, I did. If those thing get out in force and try to attack the village, damn, that would be scary. Please do something about this!"

Hellooo, good evening everyone (said with an unnaturally cheerful smile)!

This may have come out of nowhere, but every thing had a limit, did they not?

Anyone would get goose bumps if they saw some ten billion of those cutesy ladybugs skittering about, and even mankind, when they surpassed the ten billion, started skittering around and were a serious problem, or so said the ancient records that we had.

It was not good to skit about so much. This was also written in the Bible. Thou shall not skit (audience laughing, except a mere recording).

The same could be said about fairies.

Fairies were once said to bring happiness.

However, even happiness was a problem if there was too much of it. Right?

For example, what if, one day, without warning, the garbage dump in your town turned into some really fun Neverland? That may have been created by a massive number of fairies.

Still, be at ease, we are here for you (audience shrugs).

The Office of Mediation of Kusunoki Village had definitive experience about solving cross-racial problems.

With this solid experience behind it, the Office of Mediation will Re☆Solve all your problems!

Please call us at this number (displayed at the bottom of the screen).

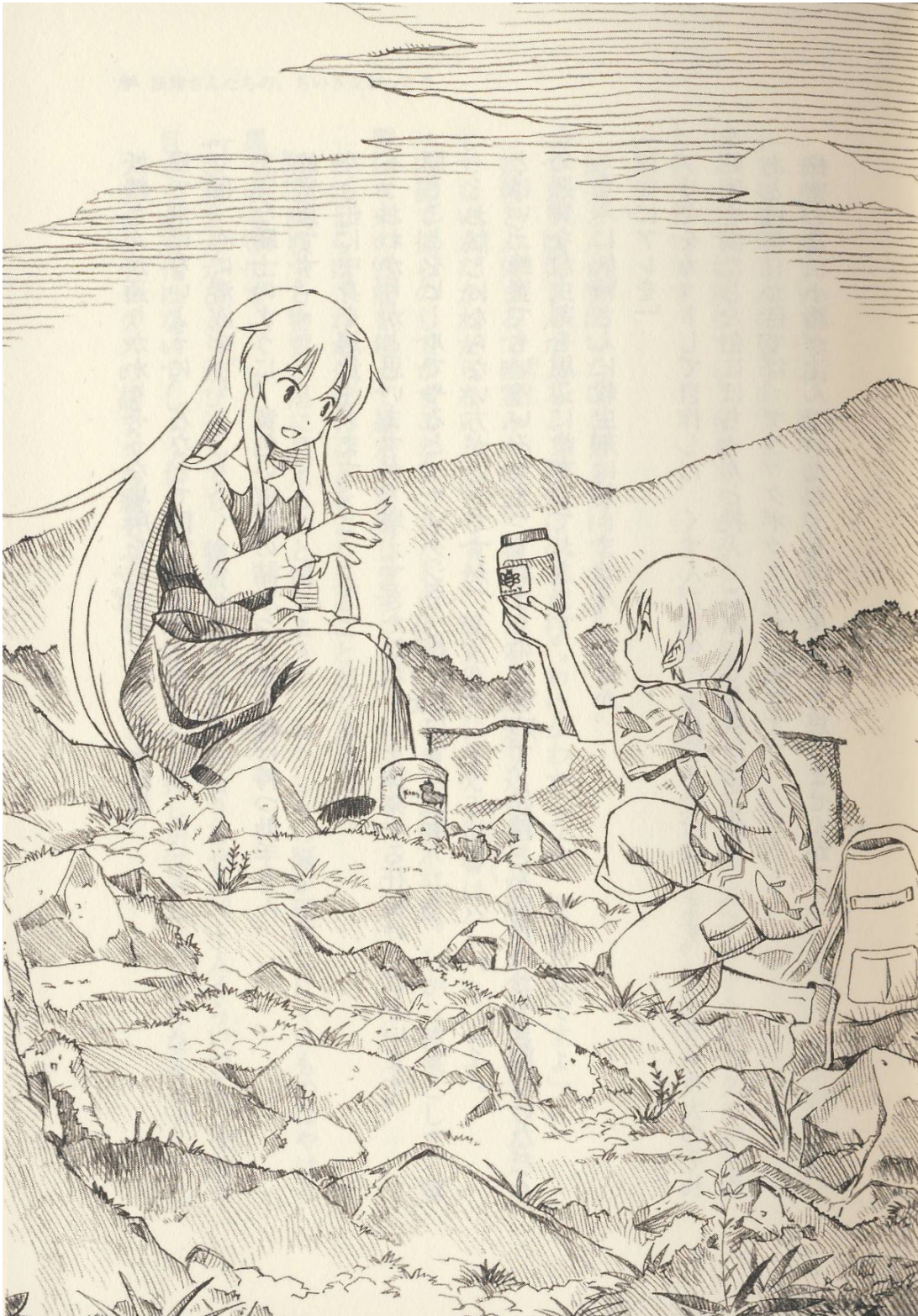
...there, ad done.

And so, well, as far as how things went, that was how it went.

"Now then, Assistant-san, let us have another trap, please."

Assistant-san put an empty can in both hands and respectfully held it out towards me.

"Right, right, this... you can put it around here, there."



Determining a location that the fairies might go past, we set up the empty can there.

We put some stones in it so that the wind would not blow it away.

"Now then, next comes the solution."

Like a loyal gentlemen, Assistant-san held out with both hands the bottle filled with a yellow liquid.

It was a bottle of honey.

I poured a good amount of it into the empty can.

I believe it clear at this point, but this was a device used to trap fairies before they increased too greatly in number.

Doing the same thing with beer would allow catching a mess of slugs.

...well, you would do better not to try that.

That being said, as we did not want honey to also attract a mess of other things, we sprayed some nasty stuff, insecticide, all around the trap to make sure that nothing would approach except for fairies.

By the way, insecticide did not work on fairies. For some reason.

"Next, the thing."

Assistant-san gave me a metal box that I had made, shining silver and cut out from tin. I splashed a large piece of caramel from inside it into the can filled with honey. And with this, the trap was done.

"Next we need to wait a few days, and then we will have a completed black box."

Did you not feel like you wanted to enter that tiny box after it had sunk into that sea of honey?

I did not think so. No one would.

But the fairies would.

And once we wait several evenings, that well darkened black box will be filled to the brim with fairies and that will be that.

"..."

Assistant-san's eyes said he wanted to ask me something.

"To put it briefly, once the fairies get inside, the substance will turn just a little bit into something *bizarre*."

The fairies were like ghosts, they could easily slide inside objects. For people who may or may not be real that was quite the impact to have on the physical world.

It was nearly impossible to comprehend what mess they were making inside. Still, as far as the results went, the substance went past its own basic capabilities and began rampaging about.

We could not really see things that we could not understand.

Just like substances that absorbed light became dark, our brains saw things they found hard to understand as black.

"If just a single fairy hopped in, the substance would not really become black. Even if a dozen of them did the same, it would, as expectable, not make any significant change. However, if a large number of fairies were to push their way in... this is what happens."

I shook the the bottle with the black boxes in it.

Each individual tiny box should have a few dozen fairies in it.

Supposing each had fifty fairies, the whole of the bottle would be able to preserve several thousand fairies.

That was how many fairies had come to visit us.

That was a problem.

"I hope that this is everything..."

I looked around from up the hill, but I could no longer see those walking machines that were running amok until a few days before. I hoped that ruckus had been well and solved.

When fairies skitted about, their results were spectacular.

The problem was how to deal with the fairies going beddy-bye inside the black boxes.

Just throw them away?

Do not be ridiculous!

We had to scatter the fairies in some other place, even if that was hard work.

The tiny box made of tin was, to say, the smallest possible thing that could still be called a device. It was of such primitive a make that it should have been difficult for fairies to make it go rampaging about, and at present it still had not suddenly burst out legs and started running around.

In its original sense, a black box was something with the ability to deploy a mysterious power. Put inside an electric lamp it would work as a battery, if sunk into a pond it would change the substance of the water, if baked together with food it would multiply it, if put to sunlight in the lounge it would emit a faint light at night, if set in a crack in the floor, the house would fly in the sky—

A black box could do anything.

It could even cause a Fairy-Tale Disaster if tossed inside a hollow in a tree.

Careful supervision was important.

And that was why it was going to be all right.

The UN Office of Mediation of Kusunoki Village already had solid achievements in the realm of resolving racial issues.

On the morning three days later we found that a large hole had opened into the bottle, as if melted through.

Inside was empty.

There was no way to explain how this happened.

Who could ever predict that the black box would grow legs, melt the bottle, and run away?

"This was made recently..."

I actually did find that possible. Right, it was there, just several lines ago...

It was a blunder of mine to underestimate how to prevent something built that simply from running away. Mismanagement of this sort was a scandal for a role model like me.

"Whatever, we just need to catch them!"

I rushed out of the Office with a net and a basket in hand.

Even the outbreak of insects that had occurred some time ago I solved by walking with my own legs. And I was going to solve things that way this time as well.

Awww, still, what a problem...

Animalia / arthropod / insect / cockroach family / Mysterious Cockroach subcategory / Jet-Black Cockroach.

What was that all about?

That was the formal designation of the black box that had escaped (woow).

One of those that evaded me fled into the Village and had the misfortune of being caught by an insect researcher, who wrote an essay on it, managed to weave his way through the wide gaps in the sciences that at present we were severely lacking in specialists for, and had them accepted as a proper species of cockroach. That was ridiculous.

These days, research papers were formatted as circular notices and distributed around the

lands, and when I discovered a picture of that black box with legs among them I nearly fainted.

After that, I spent all my days attempting to recover the black boxes that had taken such an interest in the Village, and while I was so scarily accustomed to this that I for the most part I managed to recover them, this of course did not end the job. It appeared that there were several more that had escaped, but it was all too naive to think that that would have been the extent of the problem, and giving up catching them was what caused me to fail. I could say I had been much too naive. I was DUMB (sob).

"So unless I find them all this will not eeeeeend..."

And as I was sitting there agonizing, a storm came in.

"This ain't the time to whine. Students're coming in."

"Huh?"

Storms gradually take Grandfather's appearance as they show themselves. And that was the same this time.

"I left you a memo, didn't I. Didn't you read it?"

"A memo?"

I quickly glanced around my desk.

The desk was covered in files and documents and books left open, so I supposed that memo was there. It was also possible that the wind had blown it away.

"Well, what exactly is this about?"

"The thing 'bout teaching."

Grandfather said that with eyes that said he expected nothing of his granddaughter.

"Are you perhaps conspiring behind my back to have me do something wicked like act as a teacher?"

"It's just teaching, it's no big deal. I'm also an orator at a local public school, I get kids entrusted to me four afternoons a week and it's no big job."

I believed that the face I was making as I looked abruptly up at the sky was the exact one I would make if I saw a meteorite falling.

"I refuse!"

Thump, I smacked the desk and stood up abruptly. With escapism and diplomacy (as I was taught).

"But the kids're here already."

Grandfather pointed behind his back with his thumb. Where my gaze was led to was next to the entrance of the Office, where three kids with their own mothers were standing.

...uh-oooh.

What point is there in disturbing the peace of a classroom? As a rule it could only be said case by case, meaning there were apparently several reasons.

For example, problems with the nature of the teacher, problems with the children's motivation to study, and problems with the facilities and the acceptance of pupils.

But the three students only used those reasons as a pretext to destroy the concept of school itself.

The teachers, the children, the facilities, everything was makeshift.

It was clearer than staring at perfectly clean glass that this would not have succeeded.

"Uhhh, g-, guys!"

The three were sitting casually around the room, and I called them from the teaching stand (AKA five wooden planks), which was actually pretty far away. I could not deny that their

teacher's voice that reached them from a height they were not used to was a little nervous.

"Uhm, could you sit a little bit closer?"

Suddenly an odd silence ran around the classroom.

After the school had been formally reopened, Grandfather chose this empty room from the same Cultural Center as our Office and we prepared it in haste. We set up a blackboard, we gathered desks and chairs (but only three-legged ones), we installed a teaching stand (but it was made by just five wooden planks), we had a teacher's desk (but only a wooden box), and we managed at least the appearance of a classroom.

The place was nothing if not big, which was inexcusable, but it seemed like we could fit thirty students or more, at least.

However, at present, we only had a mere three students.

It was impossible to compare this with my stay at The School. Us having few students in our generation was the same, and the classrooms were a little smaller, but having to stand shoulder to shoulder while being lectured had a sort of an idyllic atmosphere to it, and most importantly, the majority of students had a love for learning.

And these three did not seem to want to learn anything.

They were simply dissatisfied with the present situation, I managed to tell that in less than an hour since I first greeted them.

The three were nice in front of their mothers.

"Well, sensei, we leave the rest to you, hoh hoh hoh!"

After they left, the three children revealed their true natures.

The three faces switched to sour.

Antagonism aside, the three did not seem to get along well with each other. The three took distance until they were respectively in the left corner, the center, and the right corner of the classroom, which looked quite bizarre. They had each picked up their chairs and desks and dragged them to those locations. They ignored my attempts to stop them.

"You know that it gets hard to do things when you are that far away?"

I gave them my friendliest of smiles, dealing conscientiously with my students. There was even no need to recall my memories of when I was a problem child, it was clear that this attitude was belittling the students. However, while I understood that, I could still not find any decent way of dealing with this, so I was left abandoned in a cruel position with no alternatives.

The three children pointed at each other in clockwise directions and loudly shouted this with one voice.

""""I don't wanna be next to that one!""""

Now then, for the sake of all the people reading these minutiae, I shall introduce these three little rats.

"C'mon, forget that nonsense, tell us sensei, it true that you talk to fairies?"

The cheeky brat making a grinning smile in the seat next to the window was A-kun. As always, I have concealed the name in order to preserve privacy.

He was a little shorter than the other three, but for that he was tanned, he really looked like he ran about the great outdoors.

He helped with the family farm and had never been in an educational institution before.

"I've never seen them fairies, show 'em to me!"

And as he said that, he toyed around with a remote control that seemed to be an accessory for an electronic device with one hand.

"No such thing as fairies at all. Not impressive that you believe that nonsense."

Another boy, B-kun, snorted and shifted up his glasses.

B-kun was slender and tall, he had the air of an intelligent and accomplished student, he had the exact opposite attitude of A-kun's, he felt like an adult. The three seemed to be around eight years old, but B-kun on his own could have plausibly been said to have been around three-four years older.

He was the son of a land owner family and they had been living in our Kusunoki Village since ages past. He was in other words the young master of a magnificent mansion, however, the era being the era, he had no high level education.

"hell does that mean!"

A-kun, who really hated B-kun, bared his hostility.

However, they were too far away to pick a fight. B-kun was sitting next to the corridor.

This may be sudden, but I had a notice to give.

According to the teaching principles I had been given by the PTA (which I heard was formed just yesterday), it seems that as a teacher I was to ignore hostility between children. Children were pure beings like angels devoid of filth. Therefore, it was impossible they could hate anyone, which meant that there was no harm in their teasing or their bullying. These were tragedies that arose from being unused to expressing one's emotions, meaning that receiving proper education would make one's fundamental virtues show, eventually awakening their angelic personalities that slept at the bottom of their consciousnesses, or so their parents thought seriously. Amen.

Regardless, Grandfather's orders were for me to not go against the parents.

Therefore, I would make sure that I was going to use the educationally-conscious language that follows, as recommended to me by the PTA.

"Hate" → "Actually love"

"Avoidance" → "Embarrassment"

"Bullying, Violence" → "Spirited touching"

"Insulting" → "Unique speaking style"

"Beating" → "There was a bug on your face"

"Slapping" → "Beginning of a friendship"

"Disagreement" → "Having originality"

(This continued for several hundred terms.)

...there were many of them, I can say.

Oozing with the feeling that I was never going to accept that children could be cruel even to the point of death was quite the difficult job indeed. Well, when it came to our children the hearts of their parents were truly whoopsy-daisy (to use the replacement term recommended by the PTA), what else.

"How long do we have to wait!"

The girl, C, shouted that as she sat at an unnaturally low desk in the back of the classroom.

"Sensei, please actually do homeroom! Stop reading that paper already! We're still not done with self-introductions!"

The last girl, C, was hugging a plushie at her chest. Born from a farmer's family, she had been raised from an early age to help her household, and I have that she was yet to learn how to read or write. For that, her words were clear and her attitude proud, making her seem quite sagacious. It was easy to tell why her family wanted her to receive an education.

"I believe there is insufficient background work! I don't believe that to be a good thing!"
I was going to have an insect stop on her cheek (to use the replacement term recommended by the PTA), but before these ultrasonic waves even a crane fly might get smacked away.
"You really have no delicacy. That's why I hate girls."
B-kun pushed up his eyeglasses as he loudly clicked his tongue.
"I don't like you, but I'll agree with you that women are a pain in the behind."
C-chan cast a lance-like gaze at A-kun.
"...You're gonna *participate* to today's farewell party."
'Participate' was the act of hanging a child, one who had done something naughty according to school trials, during a farewell party.
In educational spaces, the deterrent that farewell parties held was not to be underestimated, or so it was written in a book.
"And why is that I'm the only one to have a farewell party! Take out B-kun, too!"
"But it was A-kun who said 'pain in the behind', right? You said it, right?"
"Don't mess with me. Don't insult me! Or do you want me to take out B on the farewell party, too!"
"Why're you taking anyone out? I don't get it."
B-kun clicked his tongue again.
"I'm the one who doesn't get it, you tramp."
"Do not call me a tramp! My second papa separated from my mama because of that word!"
"I don't give a damn how many insults your number-whatever papa spits out. I got the right to call a woman that I think is a tramp as a tramp."
"Awww, jeez, what's with all this stuff! This reeeally pisses me off!"
The argument between the three felt like it was only going to grow more heated.
"P-, peopleeee... could we leave the chatting for later? I would like to begin with the writing lesson."
I could keenly feel how grim my prospects were. Still, at that point my unease was only vague.

The next day, the children's parents barged in.
"I heard that your teacher is emphasizing writing for our child. I will not tolerate cruelty!"
According to ancient records, when old civilizations reached their ages of ripeness, the growth of sensitivity to human rights was quick, the awareness to said human rights swelled, and some monstrous tribes profited massively from it. There may or may not have been countries that fell into ruin due to their rise to prominence.
Their peculiar trait was to entrust children to others and fail to take their responsibilities, make repeated parasitic threats, and collect valuables and favors from these others, which made for an extremely peculiar survival tactic. Just like fishes adapted to the sea and cheetahs adapted to the savanna, these apes who adapted to a tempering society were a significant threat to politicians at the time, or so the records said. It was impressive.
"What do you think about this problem? Do you think you can just get on hands and knees or pay us to solve this? First we would like to hear about these two points!"
Grandfather, a veteran of a hundred battles, remained calm.
"That's why I called all the people in charge here. They're all responsible for the matter at hand."
I was exhausted due to having stood up deep into the night to make ready for classwork, and that struck me with a primal fear.

"G-, good morning...!"

I just barely managed to stay upright by leaning onto the teacher's desk.

I was already falling apart despite it being the second day.

The mental tiredness was far more serious than the physical one. About half of my anxiety stemmed from having battled with monster-like parents.

"Oh dear, only you two have come? Where did he go?"

A and C were sitting and waiting, but B seemed to be absent.

"Sensei, he dropped by to give us this."

What C handed me was an absence notification by B himself.

It went like this.

I'm already studying basic educational stuff like alphabet writing.

There's no point in me coming all the way to school if I'm not gonna receive any higher level education.

Why did they put children with different skill levels in the same place?

I heard you received higher education.

I really hope for private, man-to-man guidance.

"Where does he live?"

C took the plushie she was always holding in one arm and pointed prankishly across the window. I saw a magnificent mansion with a garden and a red roof.

I left orders to study for themselves and left the classroom, headed for the mansion.

And then I forcibly took B with me.

"That hurts, please let me go! This is going to become a problem for you! What are you trying to do here? I have rights! I'm not accepting this!"

"Hm, what am I doing...?"

I approached his face and gave him a quite and slow voice.

"G-o-o-d morning."

B's left cheek lifted up into a cold smile, clearly making fun of me.

I was trying to make use of my authority as a teacher, but considering his attitude, it seemingly had little effect.

"That's some barbaric behavior, like some housekeeper's. If you're gonna act like that, lessons are going to be even more useless. This is unpleasant. Just let me go home."

"Out of the question. You need a teacher's permission to go home."

"Then please give me that permission. If you don't, it'll end badly for you."

"Huh, and how badly?"

"I'll tell my parents on you."

That was his ace in the hole, or so B's elated face said.

A and C watched my confrontation with B with held breaths. It was unpleasant, like they were trying to measure my aggressiveness from this event.

Firmness, all else aside, firmness.

And as I told myself that, I snorted. And in an even more deliberately affected way,

"If you believe you can, then try it."

It would feel real good to yank away those glasses and make his eyes look like the numeral three, I thought, consoling myself.

B's lips involuntarily twitched.

"I'll do just that."

"Then I shall have you begin with writing for this day as well. Do open the text to page seven."

I stole a glance and found that B was still staring at me.
Suddenly I felt a chill of unknown origin, and in order to remove myself from that stare, I took a step to the side. Right after that, *thump*, there was a dry sound.
I looked and found that the flower pot on the desk had been shattered.

"My my."

I turned my eyes to B for no real reason.

He was as before looking at me hungrily.

When our eyes met he lowered his head slightly. When his glasses reflected the sunlight, not a trace of human feeling could be felt in his eyes.

There was no morning greeting.

I talked to them, but they ignored me.

As before, they sat wherever they wanted.

They went truant.

And at the end of everything, fights broke out during classes.

That was the mood of the classroom a week later.

If human life had its good things it had to have its bad things, certainly, but I still could not decide whether I ought have been grateful for having only three students under me or cursed my fate.

"Hey, teach, I heard you can you use magic? Show us!"

When A brought up that topic, classes started being ignored.

And, generally and with the precision of a fixed market price, he started bringing up magic whenever he was bored of lessons.

"I cannot use it. Solve the problem."

"I could solve it if you just showed me some magic!"

"I cannot show what I cannot use."

"Why're hiding it? Why the hell aren't you showing me!"

A had the habit of flailing about when things did not go the way he wanted. I wanted to exhale a sigh. But I could not do that before the students. Concern, concern, concern.

"This is so stupid. There is no way adults can use magic, correct?"

Unable to contain his irritation, B picked on A (as he always did).

"...the hell. Ain't all them witches in them fairy tales adults?"

A mumbled that.

"I am not impressed. What are you doing, still believing in fairy tales at your age?"

"Huh? Who's ever said that I believed them or anything, you teacher's pet!"

B did not rise to the challenge, he coldly shrugged and lowered his gaze to his hands. He was reading one of the volumes of The Collected Works of Shakespeare which he had taken without permission from the Cultural Center document room. Printed out from excavated data, it was comparatively new (but actually it was several hundreds of years old).

Although he came to school, he was at present boycotting classes.

A and C never had any proper education at home, meaning they needed to be taught all the way from the basics, but unlike them, B had been taught to read somewhat, so lessons could not proceed at the same pace.

While I was teaching the basics to those two, my attention towards B was necessarily insufficient. As we had that weak spot, for the most part I was giving him my tacit approval for his boycott. But I was going to have to deal with this issue eventually.

"Still, sensei, I am really curious, could you tell us?"

"What?"

"You could use magic back when you were a kid, right sensei?"

C's eyes were shining with curiosity.

"Right, you can use it when you are little, but not when you're an adult. That sounds likely," went A.

B lifted his face from his book and grinned like a snake.

"...well, they sure say that where there's smoke there's fire."

"You totally don't believe in magic, do you. Don't get involved."

"Of course I do not just believe it as-is. Still, since there's a rumor about it, wouldn't be odd if someone had proof of it. Besides, I might not believe in magic, but I think supertechnology exists. After all, paranormal abilities might exist."

"Aren't paranormal abilities magic?"

Women just don't know anything, spat out B discriminatorily.

"Paranormal abilities are obviously a part of supertechnology. So they're not really different from magic. Besides, magic is a paranormal ability."

"Magic exists! You're kidding me! Say it!"

"Do not shout, you brat!"

"Wait!" I sharply stopped the three before it ended in a triello. "What is this about a rumor?"

Asked, the three forgot about their bickering and gazed at each other for a moment.

Just like accomplices who shared a secret, they had some kind of connection to that rumor.

"...everybody says you're a witch, sensei."

A carefully chose his words.

"Who does?"

"Everybody!"

B pushed up his glasses.

"Those glasses are much too big," and I extended my hand. "May I adjust them?"

B shuddered in surprise and hopped backwards.

He moved so hard his desk flipped over.

"...no thank you. Please do not touch them."

Averting an apologetic face, B put the desk back in its place.

"A witch, well now—"

I stopped asking that question.

I had nearly forgotten who I was.

People who had never seen fairies, well, there were many of them.

Also, there were people who could not quite recognize them even if they saw them.

Everything depended on their personalities.

Meaning that the various messes that the fairies perpetrated would be likely seen differently by different people. What for some people was science was nothing but magic for others.

Every time, just every single time I was busy running behind all the problems the fairies caused, but how did people see me as I did that?

First of all, how would the uninvolved view those who trod into the domain of the fairies?

This would of course cause rumors to circulate in the blink of an eye.

One had to be careful.

"This sounds odd."

Seen from the Office in the Cultural Center, the residential area with the Village's central plaza had half-timber buildings with a black and white contrast that drew the eyes. Of course they

were not ancient, they had all been rebuilt.

Now that I said it, the population of the Village had increased, or so I recalled someone telling me.

Maybe it was my worst friend Y or my Grandfather.

Perhaps the People Monument Project, that UN cultural activity, was stimulating the influx of people.

Besides, this area was a good location for it. Electricity was more or less working. Every important location in the Village was within a few square kilometers of the center, which scored highly. Considering how many lands were in a conclusive decline, this place was among the blessed ones.

The matter of the reopening of the school was the same, still I wanted to seriously ask people if they wanted this decline.

"There it is."

I found the house I was looking for. I went to the back alley and made sure there was no one around.

I took out a package from my bag, and using the chalk I had wrapped tightly, I drew a small but tall rectangle on the wall with the ground as its base.

I waited three minutes.

"I guess that is enough..."

With my heart pounding in a very Maiden Chic style I put my hands on the wall and pushed slightly, and the rectangle opened like a door. Beyond the door laid the interior of the house. As per my preliminary investigation, this led to a back room where a large number of insect specimen were hung on the walls.

Luckily enough, I found the spot I was looking for at a glance.

This chalk was a Fairy Tool called *Superpositional Theory*.

It was one of the items safeguarded by our Office, and as could be seen, using it to draw a rectangle (like a square but longer) on a wall turned that spot into a door.

Whatever else I could think of, I could not think of any way to use this tool except for thievery, which was saying something, but it appeared to be the materialization of a theory that was quite pointless in our local solar system, and as a result our world had lost one of the original physical properties it held, something of the sort. As usual I could not quite understand the fairies' explanation. Still, it probably had nothing to do with superstring theory.

Now then.

Since no one was around, I sneaked into the room.

It was quite the large room, but I found the thing I was looking for right away. It was that black box bug, which had been taken in as a sample. It had been carefully laid onto a desk.

I opened the specimen box and swapped the black box that had been stabbed with a pin with a dummy that I had prepared before coming here. The dummy was tin painted black (the raw materials were more or less the same).

But the insect had to go and move his legs the instant I took off the needle.

"Eeek!"

"Who's there?"

Oh no, there was someone there.

I shut my mouth, escaped into the alley via the rectangle, closed the door (?), and erased all traces of chalk with my palms. The rectangle's superspace eventually returned to the wall it used to be.

I put the black box bug in the bottle and put that in my bag. I then quickly ran away from the

alley.

A successful recovery thanks to Fairy Powers!

...indeed. That was nothing less than the act of a witch.

Insects with strong vitality, a black exterior, and nimble motions sort of felt dirty.

I tried blasting him with some surfactant (a disinfectant), and, inexplicably, the black box bug stopped moving a few moments later.

It looked like it just halted for some reason.

And because of that I could easily keep it under control.

I counted what was inside the bottle I kept them in back here at home and found that I was yet to recover three black box bugs.

Given how much they moved about, I could not say anything except that the possibility was extremely high that they were broken, as far as machines went.

That was important.

Three left. I had to find them before this became a problem.

"Our child got a scrape. What do you think about this?"

"We'll call the person in charge of everything concerning the matter."

A was trying to punch B away, but instead she slipped and fell, and her parents were really angry as they charged into the Office.

With Grandfather before me, indifferent as he performed maintenance on his favorite hunting rifle, I had to deal with these raging parents.

"A-kun is to blame, she was trying to punch a classmate..."

"Why are you discriminating our child!"

The father thundered at me with a bright red face like a red oni's.

"No, this is not discrimination, it was A-kun who raised her hands first..."

"That's how much she was hurt! That's how much she's to be pitied!"

He was shouting so loudly that the window panes we had just replaced were rattling.

We just fixed the windows, it would be a real problem if they broke again.

"Please apologize!"

And I felt like, awww.

"Well, I mean, fighting is just bad, all right? That aside, A-kun just slipped and fell, so it is she that..."

The mother charged forwards.

"What are you talking about! I don't get what you mean!"

And I felt like, nggggh.

"It was our kid that was the target of violence, right?!"

And I felt like eEeeEeeEgh oooooOgh AaGh.

Grandfather vigorously pointed towards the floor.

...what, he wanted me to genuflect?

"Also, I heard that you keep asking for the morning greeting in your classroom, but our child is still a good boy even if he doesn't say good morning, so stop being so insistent!"

"T-, therefore, we are going without morning greeting beginning from this day on..."

I somehow managed to keep myself from collapsing by clinging to the teacher's desk.

"Sensei, when are you going to show us some magic?"

"I have no magic. I do have paranormal faculties."

"Sensei, I believe you should just answer the question!"

They just did not know how hard people had it.

"Everybody in your places! Class is about to begin!"

The three students all together started jeering at me.

Normally I would try to calm them down somehow, but until they were persuaded, this would not end. The booing then continued, and eventually they left their seats and started fighting, and the situation became impossible to control.

And there, suddenly, I had this delusion of how good it would feel to put a nice stop to this by borrowing the powers of the fairies. I shook my head and cleared away that temptation.

Even if it had been fine for the time being, later it would have meant my neck.

Educating humans had to be done with the powers of humans.

"Uhm, open the textbook..."

Noise, noise.

Textbooks flew in the air.

"...to page fourteen and..."

Squeal, squeal.

A party cracker was popped.

"Your teacher is telling you to..."

Squeak, squeak.

One of them stood on their desk and stomped his feet.

"...this is not working."



Even B, usually so calm, changed once a fire had been lit in him and went wild.

Seeing children rapidly losing their humanity as soon as they saw something they did not like, I could only stand there without anything I could do.

The next morning, B's parents charged in, furious.

"I heard that you shouted at our child. Scolding a child so loudly is impermissible. Children sometimes just want to make noise. And your job is to watch them over with kindness when that happens, isn't it? Also, our child has a weak throat. If he shouts for too long he starts bleeding at night. If you don't make sure he doesn't shout too loudly it will be a problem. And that's why we demand improvements! Also, it's a real problem to prepare lunch if class goes longer than the middle of the morning, so we'd like you to keep them until evening."

Unbelievable as it may be, they truly said all that.

And I at last had realized my limits.

Having realized them, I decided to try and call someone to help.

"Starting today, we will have more teachers. Please welcome them."

I completely ignored the complaints that came almost reflexively, which went "are you kidding me!", "I'd like you to stop doing just whatever you please", "so one-sided!", and left the classroom.

"Thank you very much, sensei."

"OK. It's been a while, but I'm gonna go right in."

Y went in the classroom in my stead, gave the barest of greetings, and began the lesson.

She had been nicknamed the Ice Queen of The School (specifically Rotten Ice Queen, for some reason). She had a reputation for being bullish, particularly with those below her station. At the very least, they would not be making fun of her.

I looked inside the classroom for the corridor for a while, and while I did not hear what exactly she was teaching, I found that Y was holding a lively lesson that even included drawings.

The children seemed to be listening intently. B, in particular, had a bright red face.

"...eh? Why?"

How did she get those little devils to be so complacent?

How was she doing this?

I thought I would just leave everything to her, but now I was really interested.

Could you teach me that technique?

Or so I thought, but suddenly someone smacked a pie in Y's face, and, since I was just peeking in, I dodged that. Who knows who brought it.

Still, as it was certain that things were going well until partway through, I grabbed Y as she was leaving the classroom while wiping her face.

"What lesson were you giving?"

Y answered this with a nonchalant face.

"Health and physical education for boys."

"Why just for boys!"

This woman was not fit for this job.

Next, I tried leaving things to Assistant-san.

The boy did have a reliable side to him.

"Now then, people, today we have a kamishibai lesson."

The three went pale.

And then, while shifting one picture after another, he showed them a deeply meaningful fairy tale.

Said fairy tale was an original production, and in it, three little sheep who always quarreled with each other went against their teacher sheep, climbed over the fence, and went out to have fun, however there was an expectable twist in which they were eaten by some wolf.

The speaker was silent so the way things progressed was not quite clear, but there were subtitles on the sketches so it did look like they understood what everything meant.

It was just that, although they might understand what it meant, they would not necessarily be having fun.

More like, it was really boring.

When they showed me fairy tales like this back when I was a child as well, I got really annoyed.

The fairy tale had the teacher sheep defeat the wolf with a headbutt, cut open his belly, and save the other three, concluding with a happy ending. As for the lesson, it was nothing more

than that *everybody has to do what teacher says*, it was quite the unmemorable and insipid tale.

The last picture flipped, the kamishibai ended, and Assistant-san gave a proud smile to the students.

Somebody threw a pie and it smacked Assistant-san in the face.

Next, I asked *that* girl.

"Good to meet you. Today I will be your teacher, and I will be smacking you right through a model of the universe."

"This is P-ko-sensei."

P-ko-san was formerly a planetary research vessel that had returned to Earth after a grand adventure.

"Please do the math."

Typically she was asleep in an energy conservation form, but at present, with energy supplied to her, she helped in many ways, working as a generalized assistant.

Her stipend for this was an hour of operating power.

Rotating her handle for one hour created enough energy to let her work for a minute.

As this was quite the attractive wages for her, at present there were few people who asked her to work.

"Sensei, I don't wanna do math."

A had put his legs on the desk and said that with arrogance.

"Now there! Is that the attitude to have towards your superiors!"

A pie got smacked into P-ko-san's face.



"...educationally... she requires guidance."

"Ah, she's angry."

P-ko-san activated the gas thrusters on the soles of her feet and rose up high.

This was going so fast that I could not manage to speak out to prevent this.

"This is a kiiiiiiiiiiick!"

Drawing a sharp arc, P-ko-san rebounded off an invisible wall before hitting her target and slammed into the ground.

"Wah! P-ko-san! Are you all right?!"

I lifted her up and found that the color timer at her breast was blinking fast.

"No damage, but... my energy... is about to run out."

"I could only charge you for three minutes."

"...nya-nyaaa..."

Ah, this was bad.

I dragged P-ko-san and took her to the corridor.

Immediately afterwards, P-ko-san folded geometrically and quickly turned into a metal plank.

She went dormant.

A dejected sigh.

If the trio had seen this, they would again start making noises about magic.

I had only dragged her out as an experiment, but as expectable, external supporters who fell under the Unrealistic group like her were tough to deal with.

Being that the children were flesh and blood humans with an interest in magic, I could not quite find anyone that I could request as a teacher. Grandfather, the most reliable person, quickly rejected me by saying "that wouldn't good for their (your) education," and I was forced to scout other personnel on my own.

"This is the Director. People, this is a really important person."

I requested an appearance by the UN Cultural Director, nicknamed VIP Boss, as there was no one above him.

"How nice to see you young ones. What you need to learn isn't maths or linguistics. But !! If you lend an ear to my autobiographical activities and nobody else's, you will find how important it is to know the importance of the support of your subordinates and how to improve their intellectual capabilities!"

A pie was thrown into the Boss's face (record for shortest).

Pies were being cast about wantonly.

I asked any kind of knowledgeable person if they could act as teachers.

But no matter whom I took with I could not find talent sufficiently outstanding to command these children, and it all invariably ended with an extremely rude pie.

Eventually it became normal to talk to people while factoring in pies, and every time I met someone I did not know I asked them, depressed, if they would mind taking a pie to the face. And as this idiocy went on, I eventually exhausted my network of connections.

In the end the situation had gone all the way around, and as a conclusion the only one who could continue being the teacher was I.

That day that parents came charging in, unable to repress their anger, which was when we decided that I would not be leaving cleaning after the end of school to the students. The reason was that students were revered customers for the school, and it was unreasonable for them to clean up the classroom.

Was every last school rule destined to be overturned?

Could we ever manage to instill discipline?

I could see with my own eyes the coming heat death of this classroom.

I resisted with great difficulty the urge to unleash all the fairies sleeping inside the black box

bugs on the Village.

"Awesome, no more cleaning!"

A-sama was overjoyed. That accursed boy was an obstacle to his own good. Maybe I should have a bug stop on his face?

"You always skipped out on cleaning anyway, A-kun, and now you aren't even getting punished anymore, are you? I don't think that's a good thing. I believe you should continue cleaning until you made up for all the times you skipped out, A-kun!"

Did C-sama have nothing but complaints for others? She had a future as a proper policewoman, indeed. Prosecution from the basics? How very wonderful.

"Bah, you're just ignorant."

My, who does B-sama believe he is?

"Well, sensei, let's end it here for today!"

"Yes, that is what we will do, A-sama. Thank you very much for all you have done on this day." I bowed my head low and found that the children were hurling foul curses at each other as they left the classroom in scattered order.

"..."

Everything was heading in the wrong direction. We had barely gotten through to page twenty of the textbook.

As obvious, I could not hold a proper lesson.

If their parents' personalities were overflowing with originality (to use the replacement term recommended by the PTA), then the children loved everything dearly♪ (to use the replacement term recommended by the PTA), something like that.

They were genetically linked demons. I wanted to be rid of them. With something like *Fairy Good - Bond Cutter*.

"Teachers out to be vigilant in their dealing with children," "make sure to thank the children when classes end," it was quite hard to just give in to these overwhelming demands.

Worse, there was one additional demand every three days, and despite how not two weeks had passed since the reopening of the school, the list could barely be contained in a single sheet.

The classroom was full of scribbles, class disturbances were becoming ordinary, insulting the teacher happened frequently, admonitions and scoldings were impossible, and additional and unreasonable orders kept coming from the parents.

I was at my limit.

I decided in my heart to become a problem teacher.

First, I began working on keeping tardiness in check.

I posted the number of late arrivals for each student on a bulletin board outside the building. The parents rode in, furious.

"I have decided to start posting up students who arrive late."

With the enraged parents before me, I acted more calmly than ever as I stole a glance at my Grandfather.

"If you want them to learn, then please have them arrive at school in time."

"Keeping rules, you say! That's such an extreme way of putting it... I can't believe this!"

"People are free to come late if they want! It's insane to punish them for tardiness! This is inhuman! You should just start lessons when students arrive instead!"

I was no longer taking the assertions of these parents seriously.

"I have decided to no longer respect the autonomy of students. Autonomy, I believe, should

be a privilege reserved to adults."

The parents raised their voices even higher. I could no longer understand what they were saying.

"I am also going to stop thanking the students. Rather, they should be thanking me. I will also stop using keigo. I believe I will be ordering them around more frequently. And I will also scold them."

The parents' rage made their faces swell and turn dark as they moaned out something that was neither sobbing nor wheezing, and their bloodshot eyes were shining bright as they continued to burst out Earthmen lingo such as Apology, Responsibility, and Violation of Human Rights.

With these intensely angry parents before me, I felt oddly calm as I concluded that this was no longer about logic.

Suddenly, the elderly man's hand extended towards my lapel.

Caught unawares I failed to dodge that, and I was tugged forwards.

"Why you ○×△□!"

As he screamed out words that could never be used, if in a different sense than the replacement terms recommended by the PTA, the man lifted up his fist.

He was going to strike me!

The instant he lifted his shoulders, a thunderous noise and an impact wave that echoed even in my stomach filled the room.

"Sorry, accidental discharge."

The muzzle of the hunting rifle that Grandfather was holding was pointed outside the window, and there was smoke coming from its tip. Nais, old man. I am cheering you in my heart.

"Well then, I suppose that is what I am going to do from now onwards. Any problems?"

"...none."

"...thank you very much."

Having become so docile it felt they had their souls extracted, the two nodded stiffly.

...my, what a wonderful thing that force was.

The loss of resistance on the parents' side reached even the children (although I was sure said people would never speak of it).

When I showed up in the classroom I found the three with their faces docilely pointed towards the floor.

Normally the three would be cursing each other or plain not show up to school, it was one or the other.

I had no warm smile to give as I stood before the teacher's desk, instead I declared this dispassionately.

"Good morning... is what you are to say."

The three looked taken aback as they lifted their faces.

"Spit spot."

Urged, the three greeted me simultaneously, if not synchronously.

"Too low, I did not hear that and that makes me angry, so say it once more."

"...uhm... it felt like you just stated a personal opinion there...", went B.

"B."

I had decided that I could just call them without honorifics.

"Yes ma'm."

"Silence. And say it."

"Yes ma'am."

Overpowered, the three repeated their greeting with quite the loud voices.

They were somewhat more coordinated voices than before.

...good.

"Uhm, sensei, I believe you're abusing your position."

I noticed that C was trying to reproach the teacher that she should have been feeling so grateful towards. It was clear that this was her style of maliciousness given how seriously she was looking at me.

And of course I did not tolerate that.

"Parental abuse."

My voice felt somewhat slimy and sticky.

"What? Parental...?"

"Parental abuse, I said. I have been continually received said parental abuse from all of your parents, and my heart has broken down. The poor pitiful thing it is. At this point, I might even be capable of physical punishment."

"Our... parents... uhm... they have problems, so..."

Parents that could not perceive their eight year old children's true personalities were also pathetic.

"At present I also have '*problems*'."

C fell silent.

"But if you all do everything that I tell you, and you do not do anything to cause issues, that may fix those *problems*."

"And so, your sensei decided to start being a Monster Teacher from this day forwards. I give you my best greetings as this new sensei reborn in changes. Now then, on to the first class. Starting today I will have specialist teachers for each class. Learn well and become proper adults, unlike your parents, please. Now then, the first class will be about cleaning."

I promptly distributed the three buckets I had brought to the children.

"Sensei, really... we're your customers... can't the school do the cleaning...?"

"I was made to do the cleaning."

"Was that back when you were in school, sensei?," went C.

"Indeed. Normal cleaning, of course, but in case of *mistakes* I was made to do cleaning from zero as punishment. All the toilets, all the windows, generally all of something. It was a pretty big school, so it had five or six toilets, you know?"

"But then it's never gonna end..."

"You will work until night if that is what it takes for you to finish."

"We're not gonna hide this from our parents!"

B had a wrinkle on his brows.

"This is a dormitory, so parents will not be coming."

"This is mistreatment."

"I wish to leave this series of defeats to future generations."

The three looked at me with faces that wondered what exactly I was talking about.

"Now then, you shall erase all the graffiti you have left in the classroom."

"Eh, all of them?!"

C was shocked. She had not contributed to these graffiti.

All of these scribbles had been made by A and B.

"He... wrote them, but I didn't."

Worried about A for some reason, B gave a hesitating excuse.

I gave them the brightest sunflower-like (attempted) smile as I said this.

"Stop lying."

B was at a loss for words.

"Your sensei knows. When you are all alone you draw graffiti in the classroom."

He normally acted coolly, but, occasionally, when he was alone in the classroom, he would whisper to himself as he drew aggressive words and illustrations on the walls, an exceptionally unique (replacement term recommended by the PTA)... correction, an insanely nasty habit. My view was that he should be very much keep it under control.

"H-, how...?"

"They who command information win, this your sensei knows. On Earth in the past, those who excelled at this sort of difficult information wars were praised as the Knows. Your sensei would never miss a secret."

The three could not settle down, looking at each other, seeing if anyone was going to resist this, but at times like these, not getting along and having no solidarity was a weakness, nothing more.

"If you are done, then begin the cleaning."

The three did not move.

"Spit spot!"

The three made noises as they stood and began cleaning.

I was quite satisfied as I moved my chair next to the window, set my elbows on the window sill, and spaced out, gazing at the scene outside.

It ended as a really happy day, a honestly pleasant one like a gentle and pleasant Spring breeze.

"You're from the scholar's family, right? You're looking after those kids, I hear."

"Excuse me?"

As I was on the way back home after procuring some flour at the square, I met an elderly lady who hesitatingly addressed me as she was walking the same path as I.

"Do you mean our students?"

"That's right. They're called *replacement kids*. The three transferred in from another land, so they're probably not well know here. But the people back in their hometown all know them. Those three were replaced by the fairies."

They were migrants.

As the population decreased, the last families were unable to support their hometowns, so they abandoned them and went to the nearby villages. Although it did not happen that frequently, it was not rare either, if seen with a long-term view. Particularly Kusunoki Village, which in terms of location was an easy place for people to reach. There were no interruptions in the supply of water and food, though with limitations it was reached by electricity, and most importantly it was lively. International communities had all become distant memories, and a very long time ago. Yet still, Kusunoki Village was one of those rare lands that people visited on a daily basis. It was tolerant towards newcomers, though, at the same time, that also meant it was indifferent towards them.

I occasionally forgot how intolerant the great wide world outside the Village was.

"Have you come to us from the same land, milady?"

But by the time I asked that in return, I could no longer see the woman anywhere.

Standing stock still all alone in a pedestrians only path in the back of the Village, something terrifyingly, very terrifyingly dark remained in my ears.

Just like it had been a curse.

For a while, the children remained calm. My relationship with the ABC had a wall raised, the one between teacher and students, so I managed to keep things afloat.

However, I failed to accurately spot the seeds of treachery.

Although they shrunk back before my seriousness, they were not going to miss any chance to go against me if they found any opening.

I could more or less guess from their daily attitude that what we were crossing was no stone bridge but a single tightrope.

Their intentionally affected commendable attitudes were somehow awkward and unnatural.

At present, none of the usual pies had been thrown at me.

I had no idea whether that was the reason, but the ABC were oddly guarded in my regards.

Only four days a week, and before noon: not that it was easy, but in the end I had Y hold classes. I had it that they were pretty hospitable whenever they saw a chink in the armor.

"Imprinting's already happened, so this is getting to be a problem. Those guys see you as the top dog, so they don't mess around too much with you."

Whenever Y came to whine at me at the Office, she often had some piece of pie stuck to her face.

"It is a virtue."

"You're overestimating yourself. Though it seems to me that kids find that stuff important.

They're really simple creatures."

"And did we not use to be the same?"

"...maybe we were."

Y was staring around the ceiling as if trying to recall something far in the distance.

The next day I felt danger above my head when I tried to open the classroom door.

It was experience, I suppose?

I drew back and tried opening the door alone, and a pie fell from above, splatting on the ground upside down.

I had a feeling that, between the blackboard eraser and a pie, the pie was a little bit more evil.

I supposed this was the beginning of the counterattack.

I gazed about the classroom and found that the ABC trio did not look disappointed that their trap failed, but that they were calm.

"Good morning, children."

Unperturbed by the prank, I greeted them with a smile.

Good morning, the voices of the trio were beautifully synchronized. Given their honest attitudes and clear voices, I had a hunch that the final stage of this School War had begun, a war where I had problems in the initial stages, but had the advantage in the middle ones.

And if I had to add something, I felt that the final stages of this fight were going to be held below the surface.

The ABC Siege had begun—

"You're good at dodging pies."

Y-sensei said that in the office (currently the staff room).

"My danger sensing skills are well developed."

It seemed likely that they had been tempered by the fairies.

"Them pies, it's like they're making them disgusting on purpose..."

"Well, there is no point in smacking their enemies with pies that taste good."

"I'm gonna hang them all from a tree."

"Physical punishment is prohibited."

"But we can at least hang 'em. After all, their guardians won't bother us anymore, right?"

"It is one of my rules."

"Having to fight in the same ring as your opponent's some problem for a teacher. Huh."

"You are, how to say it, too careless. You do not stick your landings, I should say."

"You can say that, but..." and she persistently scrubbed the pie crust stuck to her glasses with a piece of cloth, "you just can't be on your toes all the time."

And still, Y was capable of standing up to them.

Especially compared with Assistant-san, who gets smeared in pies within five minutes, she got at most one every several days, no more.

"Ah, right. How 'bout I wear a helmet to classes. Boss, that armor there, it real?"

Grandfather, who was polishing a sparkling bladed weapon, went *yup* and gave her a cool nod.

"Please let me borrow it."

"Would you not be made fun of instead?"

If she went in the classroom in a full suit of armor she would more likely make the three happy.

"Will I?"

"Remember when you were a child and you were the one being mean to others? It was only a few years ago."

Y twisted just the edges of her lips, smiling like an evil person, and nodded, then went *that's for sure*.

"Don't really care to be made fun of. I wanna settle this."

"You are talking like a scoundrel. You would be the wolf in a fairy tale."

"Then you'd be the bad sheep."

"What does that mean?"

"That whatever happens you'd get your belly cut open by the good guy, same as a wolf."

"Those are some words for someone not even good at dodging pies."

Seemingly having accepted that, yet still resentful for the loss, Y smiled with her mouth closed in satisfaction. Maybe a snake more than a wolf, was what I suddenly thought as I gazed at her mouth, which looked like it could open at any point to show a non-human tongue with a forked tip. There was no change in how her role was to eat the good guy animal and get her belly cut open. She had been born under that star.

"So, how are you going to make a tasty lunch of those three little piggies?"

"Personal tutoring."

That sounded like it had the nuance of *crushing them one by one*.

"Are you going to call them over one by one?" I shrugged. "They are going to be vigilant to the utmost, so I do not believe it will go as you want."

"Don't take me so literally. Of course I know that."

"Then what do you mean?"

"You don't feel like those three are for the most part not getting along?"

Ah, she actually noticed that, I was impressed.

Although I believed she only understood the world in vague terms, she appeared to be quite sensitive indeed.

I asked her for more details and she tweeted even more happily.

"That's what you need to focus on. After all, kids eight years old are a gushing spring of mischief. I'll never get anything done if I try to target those three at once. And so, as long as the seeds of discord are there you only need to make that friction worse, break their solidarity by isolating them, and take them down one by one!"

"That would be the behavior of a demon from ancient times."

"The point I'm aiming at is how A hates B."

"Oh, how sharp. It is as you say."

"Heh heh heh. Riiight you are, wise you are, a heroine you are."

"Anything else?"

"Mh, anything else what?"

Awww, although it was not like she was not seeing this, that was as far as she went...

"Well, if you are going with the strategy of cutting the three apart, you ought to determine how the three feel. Those kids may go for an armistice and form an alliance, you know?"

And so we decided to make a background check, correction, "fail to restrain our raw curiosity" (replacement term recommended by the PTA) towards the three.

Y was wearing an Inverniss coat, a cloth hat, and a pipe (not a real one, the one that made bubbles).

How unoriginal!

"And you're the same."

"...yes, I apologize."

I was also sort of wearing a disguise. It was quite embarrassing and I stood out.

"What is even that thing?" "You know, it's that girl with Scholar-sensei." "Awww... uhm..."

"That's some odd clothes they got, huh." "Those two are dressed like boys."

Awww, and we ended up being the subject of bizarre rumors.

The ordinary granddaughter of an eccentric grandfather... that was the look I was going for.

"This really stands out, indeed. I should change."

"But it'll be fine as long as they don't see you."

"That, well, is also true."

Besides, even if disregarded this, I suspected that people already thought I was a weirdo.

"Now then, shall we go?"

To spy on the students.

First, we visited A's household.

His home was in a grassy area surrounded by stone walls.

The sheep most often seen around these parts were of the Hardwick race.

With a household of three, A was an only child. Because of that, outside of school, the majority of his time was spent helping his family.

"Except, look, that guy's not helping even a little."

A was only leaning onto a fence and staring at his parents as they worked.

"Ah, but it does look like he wants to help."

He walked over to his parents and made a gesture that seemed to say he wanted to help.

But his parents turned him away with a stiff smile and a *it's fine, we're good, go play*.

The exchange lasted for several minutes, and in the end, A gave up and returned to the fence.

"...hell's that."

"I have no idea, but... I wonder. This might be an odd family."

I was more concerned about that than that exchange.

"It feels like they are holding back, and I mean on both sides."

"They were treating him like he was someone else's child."

"Someone else's child..."

The words of that old lady that passed by me some time ago came to my mind, *he is a replaced child*.

"I believe that something happened with that family."

"Yeah."

Next we headed to B's home, a lavish mansion with a beautiful garden and plenty of rumors about it.

"When seen from up close, this looks insane."

We sneaked into the garden without permission, and we were hit by a wave of *bourgeoisie*.

With the main house at the center with a large 1.8 hectare grounds, there were three different gardens to see depending on the direction we looked.

From the slope on the north one could look down on cultivated lands, the east led towards a laburnum arch, and in the west they had built a low maze made by green hedges.

There was a vegetable garden, a cottage, a paved grassy path, blossoming rape flowers, a topiary of katsura shaped like a triangular hat, wherever we went there were scenes that would never tire us guests (trespassers).

"It gotta have taken forever to make all this. What else from people who've owned this land for generations."

"Even without currency there is still a discrepancy in wealth distribution, then."

"This here's like a Wordsworth garden."

"Then that has to be like a Wordsworth pond."

They had made a pond quite near the gazebo.

"Look at that... even the shed got style!"

"A Wordsworth shed, then."

"There's a cat over there!"

"A Wordsworth cat!"

And as we were playing at that,

"They are going to find us. We ought be sneakier."

"This garden really takes my back to my childhood. Wish I was born as that boy."

"I do wish I had a garden..."

"If you wanna make one like this, it's gonna take centuries."

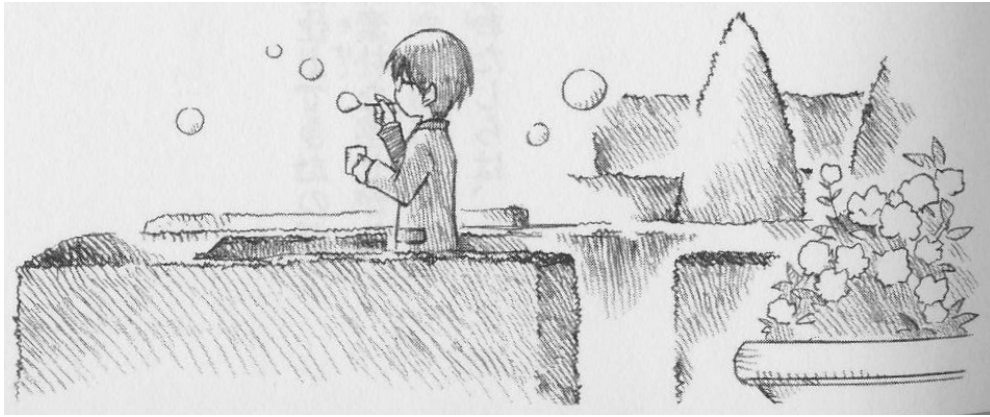
"A garden would be sooo nice..."

And as we were wandering about, we discovered B having wandered into the maze of greenery.

In a panic we hid behind a nearby hedge.

"He's playing with soap bubbles, that looks real nice."

"Still, he does not seem like he is having any fun."



People forgot to smile when they were playing alone.

And children playing with a serious face only stood out as lonely even more.

"...it sort of feels like he would be more than alone enough if just left on his own."

"Oi, I told you not to get so emotional."

"Who're you people!"

Someone behind us asked who we were, and we jumped upwards.

"Hoh, you're visiting the families? That's really impressive."

The man, who was even older than Grandfather, was the household teacher. He said he had been working at this estate for generations. Perhaps he did physical labor, as he looked strong for being so old, but he also gave me the impression of being non-aggressive and a bit naive.

As we were treated to a spot of tea in the gazebo and had successfully managed to avoid getting into trouble, we tried thoroughly inquiring about the situation of the household.

"Right, the young master always plays alone."

"We saw him playing alone even earlier."

"It's been like that since he was young."

"That is quite sad."

I tried to fish for information.

"...yeah, well, that's true."

For some reason he was hesitant to speak.

"He has no friends, that is really sad, right?"

"Yeah, he'd of course want at least one of 'em."

Y continued on the same topic.

"...yeah, it's just, the young master's gotta like being alone."

Uh-huh. I thought a little and then asked a different question.

"But his parents raised him with love, that was helpful."

"...eh?"

He was put off guard.

"They come to school often, and in our discussions I found them very enthusiastic about his son's education."

"Ahhh, that's how it was... yeah, sure," he mumbled as he continued, "the young master likes being alone, his father knows that very well."

"According to our discussions, the young master just wishes to be left alone and wants his

guardians to only spoil him... correction, be nice to him (replacement term recommended by the PTA)."

"...I see."

This time he made a face that seemed persuaded.

In other words—

"By the way, you two came here to see the parents, right?"

The gardener asked us that.

He was not correct, but since it would have been inconvenient to tell him otherwise...

"Of course, that is what we wanted to do, but it is almost time for us to leave."

"I see. Besides, the parents aren't home today. Guess you should come back some other time."

"They are absent?"

"They've been invited out to lunch, so they left."

B's parents were famous for being socialites, and nearly every time there was some group meal, a party, or some form of play, it was certain that they would be present, they were something like celebrities. They were out today for some of that 'diplomatic operation', no mistake.

"Uhm, and they just leave the young master behind?"

I poked Y with my elbow. Pick your words better, will you?

However, the gardener did not seem to be bothered and,

"It's what they always do..."

He said that with some tiredness, then stood up to encourage us to leave.

The last was C's house.

I had heard that it was a farming family, but when we arrived, we were surprised.

There was a wonderful townscape with plenty of simple cottage houses nestled together.

There were stone-paved paths in between the houses, and the tiny gardens surrounded by tree fences all had some originality to them. I loved it, it was just like the world of fairy tales.

In that Marchen-like townscape, C's house alone had been turned into something of a garbage dump.

Was this something of a collaboration between a fairy tale and a dream of reality? Then it could just rot away.

"Oj, that's filthy."

"It is a tremendous pigpen indeed."

Though the house had been built the same way, what filled the garden were not flowers of all colors, but a massive pile of rusted scrap and a mountain of garbage bags filled to bursting.

"If that's how the garden is, then we need to push on and see what's inside."

Y said that, annoyed.

"They are busy with farming... maybe?"

"Still, this is a bit, yeah, excessive."

As we stood next to the house, we saw a familiar face show up from the garbage dump.

"That is C's mother. We should hide."

Being used to it, we were in no hurry as we slipped somewhere out of sight.

C's mother had a bottle of sake in hand.

She seemed to be drunk, as she was stumbling about.

"The father of that household got himself another woman and is out with her, hih hih hih!"

An old lady we did not know (and who loved gossip) appeared behind us.

"You know a lot, ol'bones."

Y asked that without tact.

The old lady's eyes opened wide as if to say that she was waiting for those words.

"Hih hihih! The husband of that household is having an affair, he went out and left his wife behind!"

"That is not more information, is it."

Now that I looked, I saw that the old lady had a hip flask in hand, as well.

"Is this location populated by drunkards?"

"Right you are!"

"I see."

"This is definitely not like the Marchen."

"Ignore her, still, don't you know anything else? The husband's an educated dad, right? And he just dumps his kid to have an affair?"

"Well, he's the fourth or fifth dad. It's daily as breakfast in that house," smiled the lady as she drank something alcoholic. "They're cursed. There might be some cursed thing hidden somewhere in that trash."

"Is that why they have it so rough?"

"It doesn't look like they're even trying to clean these things up."

"Say, lady, did you know they have a daughter?"

"Yes, I know. I guess with all their problems she wasn't in the mind of living with her parents. She left home a while ago and now she's squatting in some empty house."

So C was living alone?

"As far as I've seen, that woman really likes her men sloppy. I guess there have to be women like that in this world. It's never gonna get better, hihihihih!"

The lady left with a cackle.

Y and I looked at each other.

"So, what does that mean?"

"In other words, well..."

Although their individual cases were different... all of them were,

""Neglected children?""

Could there have been any other reason for eight year old children to stray off the right path?

"What do we do about this?"

"Well..."

I answered Y's question lazily.

We were stepping on a gravelstone path muddy with the red of twilight as we headed towards the Office for no real reason.

Our gait was not firm because we had been left with this ill feeling that things might have been resolved, but maybe not.

Nothing had improved with our inquiries into the children's households.

It was likely that there was a little bit of a problem of child neglect.

And that they more or less had some emotional problems because of that.

"They are not really big problems, in a certain sense..."

"Well, it's not like we can do anything about household issues."

With her hands behind her head, Y asserted that like it did not concern her.

In the current era, there were many people living hard lives.

At the end of things, our teaching lives were side jobs.

Raising healthy children was not our specialization.

"Still, how come those parents came to the Office screaming so loudly about their children?"

"Matter of fact, I jus' don't get it."

And still, what was all that about the situations of their households?

"What do we do..."

If only the fairies were involved with the ABC Kids, things would get easier.

"If we wanna solve this, we should just follow our original objective, right?"

"Mh, well, I suppose that is the plan."

As the three were impossible to handle when they conspired, in order to at least have them do a minimum of what we tell them to, we ought foment discord and ensure they had no solidarity. This had been our initial plan.

"Trampling and kicking down children that already have problems on their own isn't really an adult's way of dealing with things, I think."

I had a feeling that it was this was going to be more unfair than the many problems raised by the parents' Office raids.

"...to put it in other words, if we could deal with them individually, there will no need to pit them against each other."

"But we can't do that, and that's why we came up with this plan."

"Right you are. Let us continue our mission."

"I'm OK with it, but are you?"

"In a fundamental sense. Just, how about we watch over the three for a little while longer. We can just decide whether or not to change strategy at that point."

In short, we were to defer and watch how things went.

When one was not fully convinced of something, it was better to act as cool-headedly as possible, that was the conclusion.

"...roger, boss."

"Shut up already, you and your stupid glasses! I got nothing to do with this!"

"A tramp touching me with her dirty hands is gonna soil my clothes!"

"You simpletons need to shut up! Otherwise we're gonna have a farewell party!"

"Guys, now it is time to open the textbook to page twenty four!"

While the three were fighting lessons did not go anywhere, even though the teachers were not being targeted.

"...sigh, I am so tired."

Tired from the wasted effort I returned to the Office, and found that the harshness of being forced to do my actual job made me expressionless.

This is what they meant when they said that tiredness showed up on one's face.

I was not even thinking half of the time, and one thing I noticed was that my mouth was half opened and I felt like I could ascend to Nirvana or somewhere. I wondered what would happen to the body when the mind ascended to Nirvana. Maybe it came with, or maybe it remained behind in the mortal realm and will promptly get snatched by someone else (perhaps someone not human) and carry on its daily existence. Now that I said it, and this included what the fairies always did, I wondered whether this was exactly as it looked like or if it was just some form of symbol substituted for the real thing by my limited intellect. No, I did not believe that all the phenomenons that the fairies caused were accurately perceivable... those were the sort of facts that passed past my mind for an instant, they were the thoughts I had when I was tired from working. The majority of these thoughts never remained in my memories.

...what was I thinking about?

Assistant-san brought in the tea with a worried face.

"Thank you. I am fine. I am just a bit tired due to issues involving human relations."

In this case, the most important thing was that these human relations were not my own.

These were of course problems that I had as a teacher. But it was one thing to have a teacher's problems, I had no intention of having to also take on the problems that the children's parents had. Despite that, these two types of problems were just about borderless to each other, and thinking about them made me really sleepy, which was another issue.

"..."

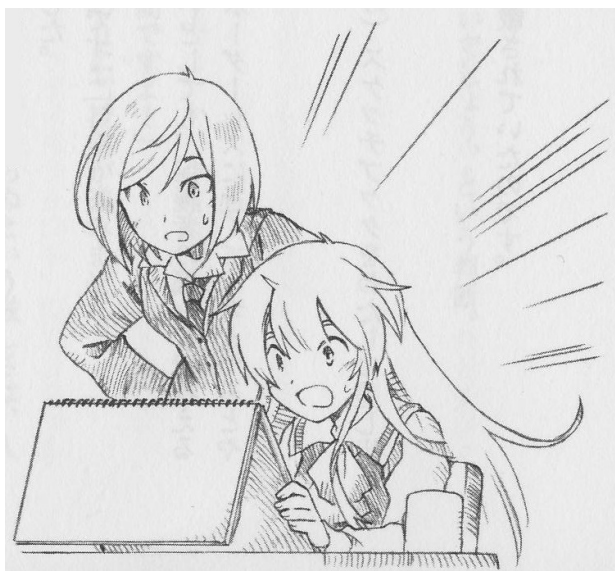
Assistant-san, fearfully, to say it, offered me his (number many-a-dozen) sketchbook.

"What? You want us to look?"

I tried opening to the last page and found that astonishing news was published there.

J News

A is in love with C



"What, really?"

I immediately felt awake.

"So that's what it was, I never noticed."

Y, standing behind my back, whispered that with surprise.

"You were actually here?"

"I just arrived... more importantly, let's try sorting through this."

Y wrote the letters A and B in an extra blank page of the sketchbook. Then she drew an arrow in between, adding information in the middle of that.

A → (love) → C

"Mh-hm... but is it actually true?"

"Now that I think about it, I have a feeling like there were signs of that."

"So you actually noticed them, I see..."

All of this despite how Assistant-san had been around the three I believed less than one tenth of the time that I had.

So he was actually sharp about those things?

...I had sort of a feeling that I was being chased by something I knew nothing about, so I focused on the sketchbook.

"Sure, A rarely curses C... but, truly."

"He is kind of shouting at her to hide his embarrassment. It just makes him more and more suspicious, doesn't it."

I asked Assistant-san if he had noticed anything else.

When I did, he hesitated a little bit, then, without confidence, added a relationship arrow.

C → (maybe loves) → B

Y and I were both surprised as we went *really?! in perfect English.*

"Eh, what does that mean?"

"Come on, it means that B loves A's beloved C, right?"

"Like something so cruel is possible! That is much too one-directional!"

"Calm down. I remember now. Did C ever give a farewell party to B?"

An electric shock jolted me.

"...no, not even once."

The three of us stared into the sketchbook in silence.

Assistant-san wrote a summary of the situation on a new page.

A → (loves) → C → (loves) → B

"You know, there's actually something I noticed."

Y started out with that with a perplexed face.

"Does that relate to this?"

"I dunno, but since I'm a bit confused and can't figure that out by myself, I'll just write it here."

She took the marker in hand and drew an arrow in the opposite direction of that one-directional relationship.

C → (hates) → A

"Hummm."

Now that she came out with that, well, I supposed that was how it was, I thought.

"I got one more."

B → (hates) → C

"Hmmm."

Thinking about farewell parties, C was always attacking either A or me.

He should have just confessed his feelings to the one he liked, really.

There was something hard to think. At the very least, I have never managed to build a relationship of trust with C. She was as if being repeatedly pestered by someone she hated, that was quite the convincing conclusion.

"So, actually I got one more. This is the last, though."

A → (hates) → B

"That, well, looks true."

"But it was in a blind spot for you, right?"

Assistant-san saw through to affection, Y revealed hatred.

I could not help but feel that this proved their nature as human in very real ways.

I once again sorted through the data, put the ABC trio at the vertices of a triangular formation, and filled the spaces in between with arrows.

I suppose it would be faster to see the drawing, but as far as what it said, it was something like this (please make sure to draw it yourself. It will be easier to understand that way).

•Arrow order is *hate*

A ← C ← B ← A (loop)

•Arrow order is *love*

A → C → B

"Being hated by the person you like is one of life's most frequent patterns, huh."

Assistant-san was perhaps shocked by how vulgar these human relations were, as he made a face like he had heartburn.

"...shall we have lunch?"

"Say, could A maybe be jealous of B?"

Without even laying a finger on the sandwich I went and procured, Y was staring at the sketchbook as she suddenly asserted that.

"What? Is that because C loves B?"

"Yup-yup."

Of course, once A learned that the girl he loves (C) loves not himself but another boy (B), it was easy for that to turn to hostility. It was a very common process for the creation of jealousy.

"That I suppose is an interesting point of view."

Though there were only three children, there were many points of view.

"If so, then there may be a reason why C hates A."

Y stopped moving on the dot, her fork sticking up straight in her katsudon.

"But it is possible to interpret this as her simply hating rude boys, and it is a difficult prospect to tell which is truth and which is background noise, indeed... wait, what is going on with you?"

Y was lost in thought.

And then, without a proper reply, she said this with thinned eyes.

"Let's go again today. To spy."

"So, who are we investigating?"

A, insisted Y.

Despite how a long time had passed since the end of classes, A was still inside the Cultural Center.

I just happened to witness A as he wandered around the building for a while, chucking in his stomach some bread smeared with peanut butter that he had brought from home, inspecting the rooms of the building.

Since eighty percent of the rooms were not in use to I did not reproach him, so I was going to leave him alone, but there was a tendency for the other two to also remain behind, meaning, in other words, that they did not go back to their own homes right away.

A was searching the rooms not in use one by one, examining the plumbing or investigating scrap material.

"Found A. So, what comes next?"

"Wait. Today B and C are also inside the building. They might have a near miss with him while he's out doing whatever on his own."

That near miss happened quickly.

A and C, who were searching about, bumped each other straight on their heads while turning a corner.

"Eek!"

C had bread in her mouth. The bread fell on the very dusty floor with the side with the marmalade on it facing downwards.

"S-, sorry. So you were still here... me too. I was searching..."

"..."

C saw the bread that had fallen on the floor with dispassionate eyes, then shifted her gaze to A.

"If you find any item that looks valuable—"

Partway through his speech, C punched A in the stomach.

A was writhing on the floor, stifling a groan.

After giving a single glance to her classmate that she had downed in one strike, C left, huffing in anger.

"...even children can be cruel. Don't I knew that."

"...this is worse than having an insect stop on his cheek. And I do know that."

That was our impression, having as we had experienced our fair share of the darker side of humanity.

Now then, as I was about to head to look after the guy, Y grabbed my wrist.

"That was also jealousy."

"Huh?"

"There's one more thing that I want to see."

"The one that has yet to happen?"

Y agreed without a word. Nothing to do, we had to conceal ourselves again, but whatever she wanted to see was unlikely to make me happy, I thought.

A, then on his knees, picked himself up and waddled off, holding his stomach. For being an eight years old, the sorrow he emitted was no small thing.

"...now I feel him like he is just this poor thing."

"Starting to feel pity for him? You just hang there a little."

"You want him to meet B, do you not?"

"Oh, you noticed? You actually noticed?"

"It ain't gonna happen."

In that relationship triangle drawing from before there was just one connection missing.

Clockwise love, counter-clockwise hate, and to make matters worse, how excited Y was at the prospect.

Not ten minutes later A, hurt in body and in feelings both, met B, who was playing the same game of inspection.

"What the hell's with you, remaining behind like that..."

"Your clothes are dirty."

"Yeah... I stumbled and fell."

B walked close to A and swiped off the dirty spot.

"I'm fine. Hands off."

"You don't need to hate me that much, you know."

"Well, I hate you."

"..."

I could tell that a slightly dark emotion was smoldering in B's eyes.

B was dusting A's clothes without words. A did not want that, and, becoming angry, the two grabbed each other's wrists. It became a wrestle, but in the end, trumped by body size, the result was that B came to push A into a wall.

Y was writing down on her notebook at tremendous speeds.



"What are you writing down?"

"Don't interrupt me."

"That would be a scene where we ought intervene, however."

"I'd rather you not stop it. I'd like to observe them carefully until it's over."

"And where would it be 'over' between two eight years old?!"

"The two have waited long enough. Wanting to see with her own eyes what's gonna happen is the true image of a Teacher."

"A is saying no!"

"Even hets need a little bit of a right opportunity."

It was much too late for this girl.

The boys, on their own, had their heads close to each other as they stared intensely without words, meaning the situation had reached a dangerous stage.

"Stop it, it's creepy."

His denial was a little feeble, like he had given up.

B squeezed his fists. On his face, anger and embarrassment fought, which led to a groan that meant he was wondering what he should do, and in the end – but that was not the time to explain this.

"Ah, wait!"

Ignoring Y's restraint, he jumped off from the corner.

"Yes you there stooOOOoop! Our school has no place for illicit same-sex more-than-friendships between young ones!"

A and B were startled and faced back towards us.

It happened, then, that a gust of sudden wind that the two created pushed us backwards.

"What?!"

My feet were peeled off the ground and I softly flowed behind.

Still, the lack of gravity lasted an instant, my body naturally sunk downwards and my feet once again landed on the floor. Y had grabbed my arms and dragged me.

To escape the wind pressure, we hid behind a corner.

"W-, what is this about?"

"This could be a Fairy-Tale Event, perhaps."

"Not a Problem?"

"No, an Event."

Around this area, the general public called incidents in which victims were many as a 'Problem', and solvable issues below that as 'Events'. By asserting that this was no Problem but an Event I could avoid responsibility, an adult's technique. This was not to be told to eight year old children.

A pressure my eyes could not see was moving down the corridor, gathering up pebbles.

B pinched up the bridge of his glasses, twisted them, and the wind pressure became even stronger.

"I suspect something is up with those glasses."

"And that lad over there is also up to something."

With a face from which emotions were completely peeled off, A pointed a remote control towards us.

"You are quick on the uptake today."

Switch on.

Without any warning, a crack ran on a nearby wall, wrecking it like an explosion.

Fragments were quickly caught up by the gust of wind, to the point where it was hard to keep

the eyes open.

"Retreat! Retreat!"

"Roger..."

We scuttled back towards where we had come from and left the Center's building for a while.

It did not appear that the boys were following after us.

"I was wondering whether I could do anything had I been attacked while I was still up in the air."

"...they really caught us off guard, huh."

We were doing nothing but cursing our mistake.

•Parent and Teacher Meetings Infinitely Near the Interrogation – The Case of A's Father

"Are there still weird things happening around A-kun?"

A-kun's father reflexively averted his eyes at my question.

"There are, right?"

"...there aren't."

"There are not what?"

"Weird things."

"There really are not? Things moving or breaking despite not being touched, for example."

"...none."

"How does A-kun spend his time at his house? When we last came to see how things were he said he wanted to be left alone, however."

"How, you ask... we just let him do what he likes."

"There are other people's parents who look after him in many ways. Food, helping with work, those things."

"At our house, everyone prepares the meals they eat. He too, he's skilled in the things he makes and eats whenever he likes."

"But having a peanut sandwich for lunch is to be a little inconsiderate in the nutritional aspect, you see?"

"And that's why we asked you people to take care of food!"

"Ahhh, I see."

"That's enough, right? We got work to do... we're busy!"

"But if you are busy, then you should just ask your son to help."

"No, we can't, we just can't do that."

"Why?"

"..."

"How long has he been carrying that remote control he never seems to let go of?"

"N-, no idea."

"Ever since he was little?"

"Right, since before he could speak."

"But you said you didn't know, you liar."

"..."

"Your family moved into the Village three years ago, correct?"

"...right."

"And odd things happening around A-kun?"

"I said they didn't!"

I shone the light in the father's face.

"It's too bright, stop it..."

"Are you perhaps afraid of your son? Is that why you are leaving him so free?"

"No we're not! We're not..."

"You do not wish to irritate him, not even at school. And so, when he yells, you do exactly what that child of yours says."

"No, no, no. That's not true. That's absolutely not true," he grasped his head and repeatedly muttered incoherently. "There's nothing weird about him..."

•Parent and Teacher Meetings Infinitely Near the Interrogation – The Case of B's Mother

"Eh? The glasses? Yes, they aren't prescription glasses, however... what about them?"

"How long has he been wearing those fake glasses?"

"He's a weird child, and he has never let go of those ever since he was little."

"What do you mean by weird?"

"As long as he was awake, he has always done nothing but crying and screaming."

"Has it always been like that?"

"Yes, always, all the way until he's tired and goes to sleep. Once he wakes up again, the noises start."

"What a problem. When did he calm down?"

"Just about when he started wearing glasses."

"So he calmed down the instant he wore glasses?"

"...he did. He stopped being so much of a handful."

"Have you ever consulted a specialist?"

"What kind of specialist?"

"Right, I mean something like a psychiatrist or a counselor."

"Out of the question! Our child is sane! Really, counseling of all things..."

"It would be a black mark on the personal history of the child you are so proud of, you are saying."

"No, it's..."

"Did you educate him yourself?"

"No, we left it to a man in our house."

"Something like a tutor or a butler?"

"That's the two names you could call him with."

"But you did receive counseling, miss wife."

"And when would I have?"

"Four years ago, the records say. You requested a consultation regarding child raising, that was all."

"How do Mediators know that..."

"We investigate. The job is in a sector where it is easy to get everything delegated to me," and a faint smile came to my mouth. "You seem to have been overwhelmed in raising that child."

"...there were moments. But I was just a little tired from raising a child, I just wasn't used to it..."

"Are you saying you did not just become stressed because your child was different from the ordinary?"

"Well, that's actually true."

"You never take that child you are so proud of before other people, how come?"

"Eh?"

"I mean at parties and plays."

"Because they are not places where one should take a child to."

"Despite how you took him wherever you went when he was just born?"

•Parent and Teacher Meetings Infinitely Near the Interrogation – The Case of C's Ex-Father

"This concerns your daughter."

"I don't actually know much about her. She came from my wife's previous marriage."

"So you are saying you scream out at a daughter that you do not even know very well?"

"Mh, well, my wife is also at the end of her rope. Besides, that girl, when she's not treated right... how to say it, she starts making a mess."

"What kind of mess?"

"Well, she turns violent."

"Does she break things?"

"Yeah, she breaks 'em. She breaks a lot of them."

"At those times, do things break as soon as she touches them with a hand?"

"..."

"Then do things happen such as things breaking suddenly when your daughter is near or..."

"Nope, nope. Doesn't happen."

"Do you know anything about the plushie she always has?"

"I heard she always carries it around with her, but I don't know anything else."

"Despite being your daughter."

"She's my former daughter."

"And why are you letting your former daughter live alone?"

"That's because my wife decided that. I don't know why."

"I think that, normally, a girl of eight years ought not be allowed to live alone, not even if she is nearby."

"Well, it's the truth that she's too much for us to handle, yeah, that girl."

"And the reason why she is too much to handle...?"

"I said I don't know, I don't know anything. The girl doesn't seem to think of me as her father either, we've had no more contact."

"Still, for an eight year old she is quite capable to be living on her own."

"We make food for her, it's not like she said we can't help her at all. Besides, in these times, it's not like it's so uncommon for a child to be like that. Kusunoki Village is really blessed on that."

"That is certainly true."

"...I wonder if she's really all that lonely."

Blanket Syndrome happens when a specific thing one has been using since childhood, such as a blanket, was missing, which led to losing mental stability, meaning it was a psychological disease. That blanket one always kept by one's side was not let go of even when one had become an adult, and without it, one could not sleep... or so it is said to happen. When things were particularly bad one would not let the blanket go not even if had been turned into ribbons, that is how strong one was fixated with it.

And that was how I tried to explain this using the educational knowledge I had heard.

In the majority of the cases, besides blankets, there were towels, things to wear, plushies, and toys.

Would a remote control, fake eyeglasses, and a plushie even be plausibly worth so much as to become attached to them?

On my way home, as it was slowly growing dark, I was attacked.

There had been an odd presence following me ever since we were partway through our parent and teacher meetings.

As long as there were people around, the presence kept itself concealed. But once I finally approached an alley in the back side of the Village, and the people disappeared from my surroundings, a sticky air clung to me.

But the instant I thought they'd be coming for me, I broke into a dash and rushed towards a large tree.

I felt confused, and nearly at the same time I heard the sound of something smacked hard into the other side of the tree's trunk.

The dark red thing that fell down to the ground, squashed, was a rotten tomato.

This lasted for a while.

Potted plants were dropped from places that had no buildings around, chairs hopped up and down as they came attacking, and I was chased around by tiny tornadoes.

Things like that happened several times. All of them I could avoid with no problem, I not only came out without injuries, I did not even have a stain. I have not been involved with the fairies for nothing, was how I wanted to discourage them, but it was taboo to do anything of the sort when faced with those children.

At that point, there was no more doubting that those children were behind all this.

I could think of only one reason why they were making all these pranks, provided these were not superpowers.

They lived in the dark side of our world.

"Good morning, children."

"Good morning, sensei."

The three were as usual even today.

Lessons continued so calmly it was eerie and then,

"Now then, that is all for today. Please be careful as you go back home."

"Goodbye, sensei."

There was even a beautiful farewell as conclusion, and the three took the bags which held their study tools and left the classroom quietly in a manner that reminded me of a funeral procession.

"You got nothing done to you today, either?"

I returned to the Office and Y asked me that with intense curiosity.

"Indeed, nothing."

Still, I carried a talisman with me, just in case.

"Them's really children. Looks like they just don't care anymore."

"I do hope it is nothing more."

"So, what're you gonna do?"

"About what?"

"About their parents abandoning them, childcare-wise. As a teacher, are you going to do something? Are you going to do nothing?"

"I am just not ready to do anything for them except teaching what to study, truly."

"That's what the new system we started from complaints is about. It's all creaking noises, it won't work right."

"Meddling into other people's lives is pointless, so while I think it sad, I believe I must leave

thing as they are."

"Because it's not like their abuse is mean-spirited, right?"

"Exactly."

"Then it's fine, isn't it? They can do their own things themselves. I've no idea what century this is, but that there's how our generation does it, right?"

A line so typical of Y, who had been doing whatever she pleased ever since we were at The School.

As a matter of fact, I agreed. In the past eras childcare abandonment would have been a problem, but in the present age it was not rare to find children living exciting lives without parents, and it was a misfortune of a level that only made one want to say, "...ah... well, I guess that is sad?"

Children will grow up even without parents. Just as I have.

It could be that they would come up a little bit twisted, perhaps. Just as I have.

And with that said, it was all good, I thought.

This was a little bit different from sheer selfishness, but I believed I was to be allowed to prioritize acting in egotistic, self-centered, and self-serving ways.

I loved a centered (replacement term recommended by the PTA) mentality♪.

Standing on your own became quicker without someone being overprotective.

"Meaning that I will end it at that for today."

"Huh, and lunch?"

"Today I have made none. We have no personnel meeting either. Have some self-service, please."

"An eating yourself-service, then? Flavor's not much, but that's easily done."

I suddenly snarled at that hyena of a woman and chased her out.

Today Grandfather was not in, and Assistant-san was on a break... that was how things were.

Today, only I and the ABC trio was inside the Cultural Center.

My intuition said to expect a storm ahead.

The Cultural Center had at that point been nearly completely occupied by the Office of Mediation, but there were several unused rooms and corridors.

As the result of my deeper thinking, I moved to the top floor.

I felt that that would reduce the number of victims.

Children forgetting their hatred, truly, that was never going to happen.

I believed that dealing with it was a teacher's duty.

I understood that this was dangerous. I had a talisman. But if possible, I wished to do this without using it.

"Sensei."

As I walked down a poorly lit and long corridor without even lighting, I found a tiny figure standing in the way of my path. A child... no, something even smaller, a plushie.

I realized, as I was about to pick it up, that this was a prank.

When I lifted it up, there would be fireworks, a bug, something filthy, things of those sort spilling out, bursting... or maybe something even more dangerous.

And this was the best thing to do with this explosive-like *thing*!

"Kicksy!"

The plushie flew down the corridor, splattered in the wall at the dead end, tore apart, and forcefully scattered its contents about.

An intense flash of light was accompanied by a number of explosive sounds.

The things inside which had worried me were seemingly party crackers.

My ears caught a series of screams with some young wailing mixed in.

"Was there anything you did not understand during classes, C-san!"

After everything had grown silent, C showed up with a furious face.

"Why did you do that?"

"..."

C was seriously angry.

Not just that, A and B were standing behind me, blocking my back.

This unity was only achievable when faced with a common enemy. This was the true nature of wicked brats.

"So, you three all are here, do you all need something from your sensei?"

"We are not accepting you as our teacher."

B blurted that out coldly.

"Sensei, you went and asked our parents about us, right?"

A asked that with a dispassionate tone, one vastly different from his normal high-spiritedness.

"So you're not on the students' side, sensei? Really, you're not even a little bit nice, it's like you're not even thinking about us."

"That is because I am just an improvised teacher. Committing to that extent would be problematic for me."

"Why?"

C asked me that back, biting her lip in frustration.

"Because then I would have to step into your families' problems."

"I don't get it, sensei."

"At present, I am in a situation of non-responsibility. I am not to become a proper teacher. And that is why I cannot deal with your situations. I am sorry."

"...actually, I had some expectations. The daily routine wasn't fun, but I thought that maybe there'd be something good in a school where you can read old books."

B spoke frankly.

"But there wasn't anything."

"Nothing at all."

Agreeing with B's words, A spoke out with a penetratingly cold voice, like he was reading something out.

"Nothing at all."

Even C was of the same tone.

It felt like the three had aligned. When one, alone, ignited in strong emotions, they received a sympathetic response from the others.

"Well, sensei, I've kind of only lived for eight years, but I don't get it."

"What do you not get?"

"We don't get it, we don't get it at all, not this stuff!"

As C's emotions rose, a crack ran in the wall.

"...oh dear... this... might be bad."

Had fairies been the source of the powers of the trio, then I believed this would end without deaths. But at this point, I needed to consider the possibility that it was not the case.

"Come on, calm down. This is a frail old building, do not make too much of a ruckus."

"Sensei, always talking like that..."

My evasive reply had A whisper that with irritation.

Simultaneously, the crack spread in every direction, and as it even reached the ceiling, tiny

pieces of rubble fell down.

"You know what, you have think about the era we are in, if you please. Humanity is retiring, you see? Things such as the education in aesthetics, well..."

"I don't give a damn!" B raised his voice. "I don't give a damn about any decline! We're still kids! Our lives are just beginning, don't talk to us like it's all over!"

The instant after a large tremor, the ground at my feet began collapsing.

Then the floor went away.

I expected that the shout someone gave also represented the true feelings of the other two. The powers that the trio manifested simultaneously might have had enough horsepower to uproot a small shed. With a building this size that would not have happened, and still it caused a fairly severe earthquake-like phenomenon. The floor went away, I said, and although the ceiling still had not collapsed, I could hear an unpleasant sound like a low growling. It was the sound of the building creaking.

Awww, this was dangerous—

I judged it time for a Fairy Stop and took the amulet in hand.

"Enough of this already."

"I wanna go home, I just wanna go home."

"Right, after all, even if we live like this there's nothing whatsoever that's gonna be fun anyway."

The voices of the trio echoed hollowly.

The instant the sound that the building performed reached its point of maximum dissonance, all sound and sights vanished, and I was tossed into the blackest darkness.

Though I had fainted these were not to be my last moments, as on the next instant I stood within a dimly lit mist.

I was alone.

And I could not hear a single sound.

"Ahhh, but this..."

It was not the first time I had been in a situation like this, and how I failed to avoid it was shameful. It seems that I have been misreading things a bit too often this time.

...but I could not quite remain depressed, of course.

I decided to begin by sorting through the situation.

Although that commotion had occurred on the upper floors of the building, I, for some reason, was suddenly all alone inside the mist.

That, as far as what I could think, had been a side effect of their superpowers. The spiritual power of the trio, perfectly harmonized in that last instant, caused something of a miracle.

I tried turning back.

I spotted a tiny light, like the one that one would find when inside a long tunnel.

Reality laid that way, I was sure of it.

I felt that if I walked in that direction I would be tossed right out back feet-first into where I was. Regardless my body did not move one millimeter.

But what bothered me was the trio of wicked brats that used to be there with me.

It was not thinkable that they alone would have been left behind in reality.

After all, those children had been running away from it with their full strength.

Mist laid dense before me.

If I moved in that direction, I might no longer be able tell where the way home laid. If the fairies were not involved with this, then this was a pure unnatural phenomenon, and there were no guarantees that this would be safe.

I hesitated a little whether I should continue or go back in this gap between self-preservation and morals, then with an enya-totto I stepped forwards.

As I walked within the mist for a while I came to have an odd sensation.

A sensation that said that maybe my flesh and blood body was moving towards reality despite how it was separated from it by the mist.

There was little lighting inside the building, so I found the fog dimly lit.

I walked leaving things to intuition and things quickly became bright, so I knew that I had stepped outside.

Having gone out did not mean I had reached reality, however.

I had a feeling that I was somehow going down the route I always went down during my work commute. Something that I had never seen before was located where the trees I was so familiar with usually were.

It was some scribble made of jagged lines, like some children's graffiti. Being tall enough that I had to look up at it, it looked terrifying once it started vibrating.

I supposed that was how it looked like when seen from this side, the one with the mist.

I had the feeling that if I approached I would be bit through in an instant by something like a carnivorous creature of the deep seas, so I passed by, giving it a wide berth.

"Oooi, you teensy ooonies!"

My voice seemed to have several non-working phonemes, and as far as language, I could not hear it as anything but a series of sounds of unknown meaning. It was like voices were being played backwards.

As I kept walking I once again encountered something that startled me.

Something was approaching that was standing vertically, with geometrical patterns on it and flickering at regular intervals.

Thinking about its size it was definitely human level, but seeing it pound all over like an electrograph as it passed by me, I found it was rather chilly and it made me uneasy. I had a feeling like I had been confronted with the reality of human nature.

"Excuse me."

I tried calling to it.

And of course a sound that was remarkably lacking in humanity came out of my mouth. I had a feeling that it was more appropriate to call it a vibrating phenomenon at this point.

However, mr. Electrograph stopped walking on the dot.

"Hello."

And then the thing, after emitting I sound I could only describe as *squeak squeak squeak*, smoothly slid far away. Had I managed to greet it, I wondered.

There was the sky and there was the land, there was the light and there was the darkness.

The trees were jagged lines, humans were vibrating geometrical patterns, language had lost its meaning, and every single last thing was covered in mist.

Even my hand seemed to have been traced over many times by fine lines, it was something inhuman.

...it was a world scarce in amount of information, everything was rough.

It was all flimsy, like I was behind the stage.

Seen from the back, even a well-done play could make someone go *owchy-ow-ow-ow*, and that was not proper. That was how it felt.

No mistake, I was walking down the world of reality.

Encouraged by that fact, I walked even further ahead.

I was maybe near my house, I was maybe in the square in the middle, I had maybe gotten

past the residential quarter, all while passing by a large number of electrographs.

The trio of children awaited past them.

As for how I knew that, that was because they were the only ones that still looked normal.

Because their body-to-head ratio had for some reason decreased, there were now fewer lines that comprised their bodies, but it was no mistake that these were the ABC.

My hunch that said that the amount of data had decreased might have been on the dot.

"Wait up!"

The trio pointed faces comprised of only circles and lines towards me.

Perhaps it was because their contours were confused, but their faces looked like their souls had been drained.

I chased after them and slammed into an invisible wall.

"Eh, what is this?"

Danger! Unraveling ahead!

This was what was written on the vertical warning board.

"The way this is written... are these not the fairies, I wonder?"

The range of their influence extended even this far.

Unraveling. It was unraveling. A string unraveled. Intentions also unraveled. Always imagining pointless things was an occupational disease, indeed. Regardless, there were no fairies ahead. This place was such that even they thought it was better not to go there.

"Come baaack! This does not scare me!"

I expected there would be a hilly area on the other side of the residential district. And that there would be woods and mountains where no people lived past that.

However, as there was an invisible wall next to the board, I could not move forwards.

"Why?"

And while I was confused, the trio lost their interest for me.

They spun, gave me their backs, and walked towards where there were no people.

"...well, I did not mean to use this."

Just like those children that were not quite human needed the help of adults, the not quite teacher that I was required some form of overprotection from them.

I pulled out from my breast the tiny bag that I was using as an amulet and spread its contents on my palm. A lone black box, with the same exact shape and material feel as when it was in the real world, tumbled down.

"Help faireees! Lend me a secret too!"

I chanted the spell of the useless human and,

"Yay-yes!"

One fairy plopped out of the black box.

He bounced on the floor, but then stood up like he was not affected by that in the slightest.

As expectable from beings that had reached the top of the food chain on Earth, he looked exactly like a fairy even in this bizarre world.

"Oh dear, where are the others?"

"Sleeping?"

We could even converse, this was truly impressive.

"Excuse me mister fairy, could you please look at this board!"

"Ahhh."

I would like to go past here."

"..."

Fairies normally had a somewhat fake expression on their faces which resembled a smiley, one that usually was not a smile just in the eyes, however this time it seemed his expression had genuinely vanished.

"But it's dangerous for you, master human?"

"I absolutely must take those three back!"

I pointed at the ABC, who at this point had become as big as specks of dust.

"Three teensy human animals..."

"Three people."

The fairy took out a pair of binoculars out of nowhere and without any context and surveyed the area past the notice board.

"Looks like it's mostly unraveled?"

"Gaaah! You cannot be serioooous!"

"But that's how it is."

He tossed the binoculars beyond the notice board and they promptly turned into something like an abstract painting, losing their firm contours.

In the end, as it tumbled on the ground, it was made of something like the lines of mushy graffiti.

"My eyesight went bad, awesome!"

"Did you put your eyesight into those binoculars?"

I was a human, however of a race that could not live by fighting (LOL).

"I do not mind if there are dangers or if it is hazardous, could you get something done?"

"...if you have to keep asking...!"

The fairy lifted the black box above his head.



"One swallow is one hundred thousand light years!"

"Swallow it? Are you saying I have to eat it?"

That was too scary and I did not even think of it.

"This is just right for someone like you, who wants to become super-structured!"

"Are there no drawbacks? There are, right?"

"...you won't be able to go back to being human?"

"What am I going to end up as?!"

"A god?"

"There are about several hundred fairies in there, I know... I suppose that is how many."

"We're gonna add our strength to your Bullying Power, master human!"

"A desperate plight on an universal scale, indeed."

I decided to refuse.

"Well, I would like to go ahead while remaining human. Ah! If I do not hurry I will no longer make it in time!"

"Then let's go with a timer system!"

The fairy hopped upwards.

He twisted in midair and, smack!, he smashed the black box on my forehead.

It turned into something like a pitch-black lens and adhered close to my forehead.

"Ah, things are going back to how they were."

"That's because it's Hi-Power!"

I did not understand the theory, but the fairies were sooo amazing.

"For three minutes you're gonna keep to your human form!"

"And if I exceed the three minutes?"

A shadow cast on the fairy's face.

"...well, your brains..."

"Ah, I knew it, that is enough."

It was definitely not going to be enjoyable to listen to, that much was certain.

"Then, can I get going? I can go, correct?"

I tried to slowly extend my hand past the notice board and found that my fingers passed through without any resistance.

The fairy hopped down from my shoulder. It was so dangerous that he could not come with me.

Though the invisible wall seemed to be made of stone, right now it had less resistance than water.

"I am going."

But it seemed that I had no more than three minutes.

How should I chase after them, how should I catch them?

Should I use magic?

The instant I thought that, a pitch-black cape appeared on my shoulders like it grew right out of them, and dangled down until it covered my ankles. Well well, what a nice cape.

"Eh? What?!"

My tightened fist was pushed open from inside, and a stick that was also a broom steadily grew out from it.

A triangle hat fell on my head.

My shoes turned into boots.

Magical shading appeared on my cheeks.

My clothes became a witch's.

I even grew a tail and cat ears.

A Skelecat familiar (a cat skeleton) grew out of my right foot's toes.

"Heh heh heh, master, show me your panties, well?"

"I have no need for you..."

I had the feeling I also did not need things such as this tail.

I pushed through and went back to how I was.

"Shoo! Shoo!"

The bone cat was not cute, so I chased him away.

I felt a little relieved after that.

"I think this is good enough."

Relieved and changed into a witch, I sat with my legs to one side on the broom which I knew instinctively how to use, being that it had grown out of me.

I kicked my toes off the ground and I floated up in the air, so I could chase them at a low altitude of a few meters.

The broomstick's speed was nothing to sneeze at, and I rapidly managed to reach the trio that had so quickly become big as dots.

The children had mostly lost their human looks.

They had shrunk, they had their hands on the ground like beasts, and were frantically running away, which reminded me of caricatured imps.

"I see..."

I had the feeling that I understood what they were rejecting.

A harsh reality, harsh adults, and the cruelest thing of all, becoming human.

To catch them I tried accelerating the broomstick to go ahead of them.

I heard the three little imps shouting briefly.

The ground rose visibly.

It rose upwards by several dozen meters, blocking my way.

To avoid collision I accelerated and drifted, changing my course sideways.

The rising ground remained tall, but its shape changed.

And what was born from it were three giant monsters.

One was something like a stereotypical robot, one something like an embodied tornado, one something like a bear plushie, and their massive bodies swayed as they came to punch me.

"Wah?!"

It was obvious that, in this world with no realistic feel to it, giant things would be terrifying (and I was not flying too high for similar reasons), and having lost my composure I could do nothing more than thrust my hands out towards the incoming fists. But the fists, which I could not expect to block even in reality, scattered away like they had the feebleness of sandcastles.

"...what?"

I had just pushed it a little bit, amazing.

They were only superficial shapes, then, as the monsters spontaneously collapsed and dissolved. They seemingly could not preserve their shapes for so much as an instant.

So I supposed, then, that they were not literally monsters, but the manifestation of the invisible powers that they themselves had which had made those things appear?

I believed that at present I could do the same thing.

The imps shouted shrilly and the next monsters quickly rose up.

I landed momentarily on the ground and, leaving it all to instinct, gave a full swing of the broom!

As predicted, a terrifying wind blew forth, and the new monsters dissolved in about a single breath.

Those that had no life were brittle on this bizarre backstage of a world.

Realizing that raw strength would not work on me, they scattered and fled.

They had all transfigured to the point I could no longer tell who was who, they had become something like the kind of hideous spirits of the dead that appeared in folklore.

Was that how human nature collapsed?

Anyway, it would not be right to continue anymore.

I pointed my index finger, aimed right, and bang.

No tricks and no gimmicks, a disproportionately big elastic band fired from my finger cannon and flew towards one of the imps, and as it hit it made a satisfying *slap* of a sound and restrained them. They tumbled on the ground.

I did the same and captured the other two, and as I did there an electric sound started coming from the timer on my forehead. It looked like the time was up.

I had the trio ride on the broom, wound them all around with a rope that I of course took out of thin air, got on myself, and rode back at full speed.

Partway through the cloak began fraying, scattering stiff pieces of what looked like lint behind me. The shape of life was coming undone and disappearing. Everything here was vague and had lost its conclusiveness.

We flew past the notice board, cut across the Village and fluttered back to the Cultural Center, and that was when the time was up. The witch's costume that was protecting me vanished alongside the broomstick and both I and the three little creatures got tossed onto the ground with good force.

My consciousness went far away into the mist.

When I woke up I was in a corridor on the first floor of the building.

The dust rising into the air in this poorly illuminated, empty room was lit by the faint light shining in and felt like a haze.

At my feet as I was sitting down with the wall at my back were the ABC trio, back to their original forms, clinging to me, and passed out.



"We made it back..."

I could see that the boys were wet with tears below their eyelids.

Perhaps they felt scared, perhaps they felt sad. Both seemed plausible, and it was not like I did not sympathize with them.

Still, that being said.

There were the remote control, the glasses, and the plushie laying next to the trio, and I firmly confiscated them.

I removed the lid on the remote control and found that not only there were no batteries inside, there was not even a place to slot them in. It was nothing more than an empty case.

"Just when I thought it would be there..."

Next I tried taking a good look at the glasses. I tried shaking them hard, reversing them, I tried many things, but in the end they were nothing but a frame for eyeglasses.

"Then this too?"

I could of course not bear slicing the plushie open. Though I did find it pitiable, I did cut a part of the stitches with a knife, thrust my hand inside, and checked for fairy black boxes... none. Where did those black boxes that had run away end up at, I wondered?

I stared unblinkingly down at the faces of the children.

So, what kind of superpowers did these kids have?

As I was dazedly thinking I heard C let out a *mama* in her sleep.

I carefully laid a hand on her head and lightly caressed it, and she exhaled a breath of relief and went back to sleeping soundly.

"...well, I suppose I should be going."

The next day I had no problems finding those three Black Cubic Cockroaches.

Having had nothing whatsoever to do with the ABC, they were caught in a sticky cockroach trap and were writhing on the spot. All three of them.

That coincidence was implausible, I thought, but the theory went like this.

The first one had hopped into the trap by coincidence. Having improved the functionality of the cockroach trap, it had vastly improved its capture ratio for the second one. With two of them caught its trapping capabilities improved even further, and managed to catch even the third in the same trap, and there we are.

...the fairies possessing the black box bugs that I had recovered were, as per initial plan, scattered around here and there.

The temporary school itself ended on the next day with no problems.

The trio of children went to school looking like nothing had happened and, compared to before, attended classes with a far more complacent attitude.

The siege of the ABC had ended.

For their sake, I decided to change the lesson curriculum, if just a little.

"Class activities... will be interrupted for the time being, as I believe I ought teach you all self-reliance for a while."

I was sad about how their relationships with their parents were, but there was nothing I could do about those.

They were unable to get along and nothing I could do would help.

Things were altogether too delicate in those regards, and I could not just butt in lightly.

Instead, I wanted to teach them the tricks of how to raise children even without parents.

"Sensei, are you telling us that instead of going to the poorhouse when we have problems

we'd better submit the proper documents and up and live in some empty house instead?"

A was scratching his head as he uttered her own type of understanding.

"Exactly so. It is sort of a loophole in the rules, however if you follow the required procedures you will be treated as the heads of your households and receive rationing tickets. For the most part a poorhouse can help with clothes, food, and a roof, but if you manage to handle things around you then I recommend living more freely."

"Uh-huh..."

"Sensei, could you tell us the proper procedures for moving?"

So went B. At this point he did not wear glasses anymore.

"If you get a letter of introduction from the representative of the Village, the written procedures are just a single sheet. If you do not, things will be a little more problematic..."

With a seriousness he had never had before, boy B copied down what was on the blackboard, and it was possible that he might have been thinking about leaving the Village. Even if it meant leaving the local celebrities behind.

"Ah, sensei! I want to study cooking!"

With animated motions C pumped her fist, looking in good spirits.

With her arms free from having to hug a plushie she became able to make hectic gestures.

"Food preparation is a required subject, so it is scheduled to be taught next."

"You're not good at cooking, right sensei? But you can teach us despite that?"

"I can manage the bare minimum. Nothing of particularly tasty, however."

Ugggh, and the three grimaced.

"Quiet."

Thump, I smacked the desk, and the trio, startled, shot their backs up straight.

And after that, I managed to figure out the truth about several mysteries.

One was how the trio as one seemed to not remember the events in the backstage world.

One was how the trio as one lost their attachment to things.

And the last one was how the trio as one had lost their mysterious powers.

And in the end, well, what was the nature of this event?

This was what I thought.

Whether it arose from an incomplete relationship between parents and children or not, the trio strongly objected to real and imaginary friends, and, due to attachment, wielded mysterious powers.

Those powers were of the sort that would run the same courses as emotions. That was how they managed to destroy or move things without touching them.

Now then, my idea was that, when those powers were riding the circular structure of emotions, a new nature or property have been born. In other words, while the powers were held in the emotions of the trio, it might have formed some sort of circuit.

And what did that circuit cause?

It manifested the shared emotion of the trio, of course, and no mistake.

Leaving this boring world and going to the real place they can live in, truly, all children would think at least once about doing that, would they not?

That may be a Neverland, it may be the world after death, or maybe... it could even be the country of the fairies, perhaps.

According to legends, a replacement kid, once their true identity was known, would disappear. It was said they were taken back to their original world.

But in actuality they had not been taken back, they had fled. They stopped doing what they were born to do of their own volition. Children, seriously, they were just like fairies.

By the way, I had it that Blanket Syndrome, a manifestation of youthful anxiety, often went away naturally as maturity came.

Do you not think this subject is somehow abundantly thought-provoking?

"Bof, guess there ain't no helpin' it. You ain't good with kids after all. Ain't nothing to do but for me to fold at this point, ain't it? Awww-aw, I sooo want to become an adult already."

"I myself don't understand why I'm feeling like that. It's just, no matter what I've been doing so far it was all boring... now? Now not really. I wanted to go to a dorm school like you did, sensei. But there are no schools like that anymore now. Sigh..."

"It feels sort of like I had lots of friends, but... that wasn't true, no. People who keep quiet and just go away somewhere, seriously, there's not friends, they're nothing at all! Dammit, this is so awful!"

And that was how their adventure came to an end.

From then on I was sure that, while they were still going to complain about this peaceful and boring society, they would be able to live reasonably well.

I was cold and did not quite like children much, but I thought I was going to be able to treat them a little more familiarly now that they had become just a bit more adult.

Fairy Memo - Black Box

This is many fairies sealed inside a tiny metal container made of tin.

I call it a black box because it's so perfectly black that it doesn't reflect light.

It's able to vastly increase the abilities of whatever it's attached to. Except it's just a black box, so it's impossible to understand how it works.

Maybe it's a machine, maybe it's a pot, maybe it's an animal, maybe it could be anything.

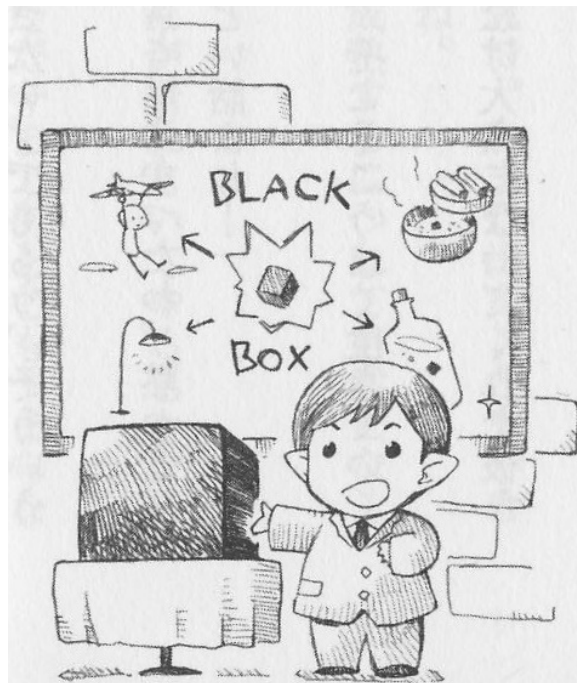
It's quite convenient.

However, when the fairies come out, and they will as time passes, it loses its functions.

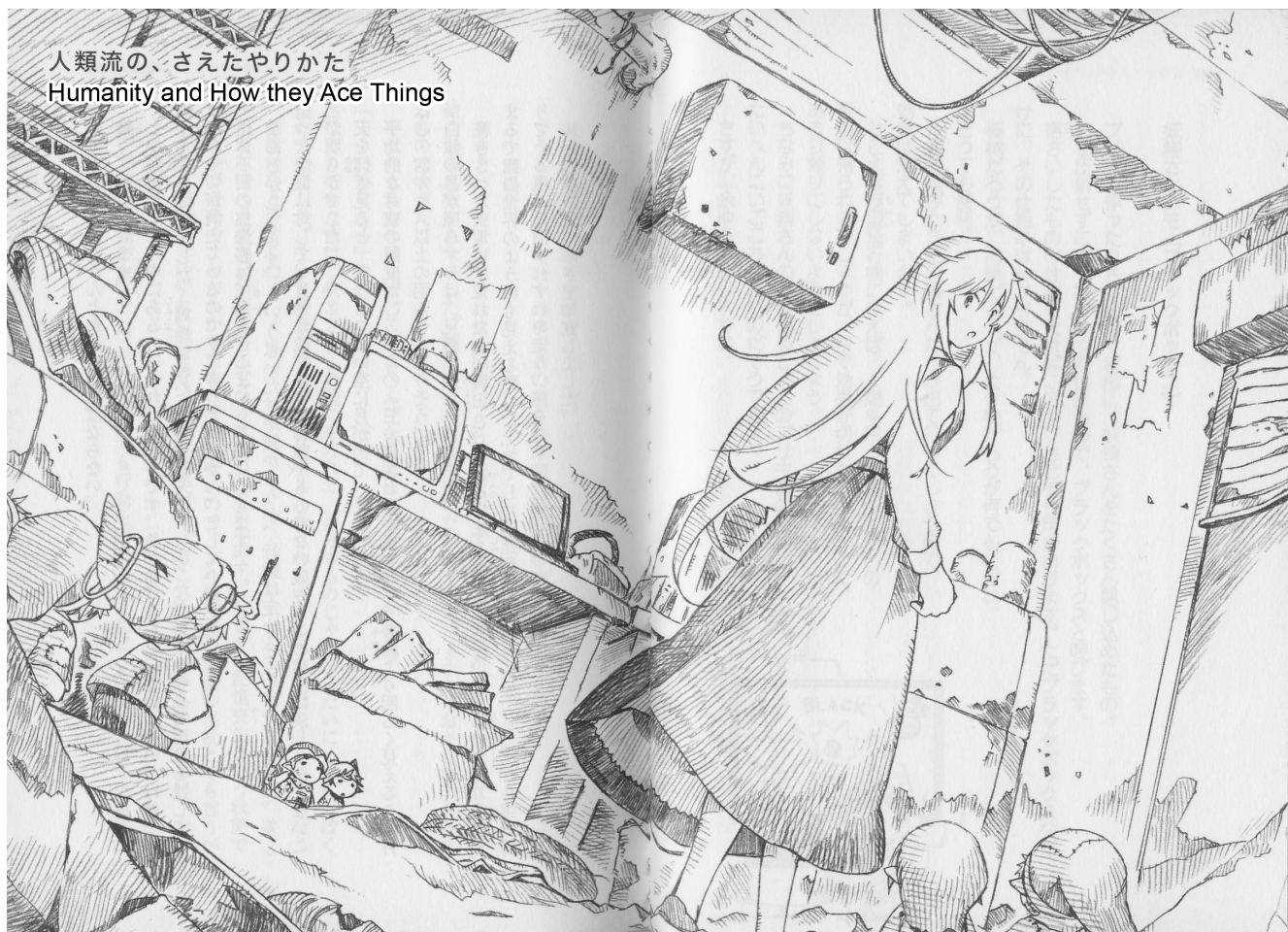
For example, if used as a model airplane, it's able to carry a person in flight, however, if its power runs out during the flight it will be a big problem, so it's better not to rely on it too much.

By the way, according to the fairies, it's incredibly pleasant to be inside this tin can.

As always, they can be so relaxed.



人類流の、さえたやりかた
Humanity and How they Ace Things



This was quite the problem. I simply had to do something quickly.

That is what I thought strongly, very strongly.

However, that was all that there was within myself. My heart was smoldering with a single thought, the one that said that I needed to hurry. Impatience dominated me. It only left that single psychological phenomenon behind, everything else of me had disappeared completely. I was sure that I was staring slack-jawed at nothing.

A feeling of impatience of origin unknown would make anyone uneasy all the way to the core. I had to do something, that was the only feeling that was strong within me, but I could not determine a course of conduct. As long as the pressing danger did not allow one to act with a sense of purpose, this emotion would never disappear, that was clear.

I look up at the heavens and found that the moon had appeared in a sky with not a single cloud.

It was said that the intensity of illumination of an average moonlight was 0.2 - 0.3 lux, so this moon that appeared clearer than normal would be brighter than 0.4 lux.

I looked around as much as I could the wasteland that the silver-white moon illuminated.

The bare ground was exposed in this utterly dried land, and, except for the sparsely growing weeds, there was nothing else moving. It was a wasteland that looked just like the world of death. As there were no shelters, the wind crawling down the hills smoothly ran the ground, and efficiently carried heat.

I suddenly felt cold.

Cold, right, I was cold.

Luckily it was going to be early Spring soon, because I was so fed up with this cold.

...early Spring?

The instant I focused on the keyword 'cold' I came to have a feeling like new data connected with it with a *thunk* of a sound. Perhaps I had forgotten the season, then. Odd things do happen.

First of all, why was I in a place this remote?

"...I have no idea."

My voice as I talked to myself was taken in by the blowing wind and withered it into something dry. That cold wind had to have been blowing on me for quite the long time.

I had been lost my more recent memories. In other words, I was in a state of amnesia, I supposed. It was not like I did not understand things about myself, so it could maybe be said that it was a mere and much less serious confusion of memories. Regardless, that I had lost sight of something did not change.

...this all put me in a bad spot.

As my dulled perceptions returned I felt a growing sense of urgency that said I had to act immediately.

There was something I had to do. However, I had forgotten the relevant memories.

It was likely that my memories existed somewhere in my brain. It was just that the connection had slipped off and was shredded, and I only felt that as something of a sense of loss. Exactly the sense of loss a person would feel when seeing a sandcastle get destroyed.

...it was night.

Given the location of the moon, it was not that late.

Rather than recovery of memories, it was rather more important to be physically safe.

There were dangerous wild animals, and if rain fell I would be prey to instant hypothermia. In the present XXth Century (unclear) many dangers existed in the lands away from villages.

It was said that people in times past feared the woods as an unknown other world, and those

folk tales were now coming back to life.

I really did not want to be attacked by wild dogs. I simply had to at least find a place where I could rest. Behind a tree, in a cave, anywhere that was not down in the grass.

I tentatively changed my primary objective.

To deal with my aimless impatience I decided to first of all search for a place where I could have a rest.

Once I had decided something, I would have no time to waste being distracted by other things.

I took quite a long stretch. My muscled, stiffened by the cold wind, creaked out from every spot inside my body. And that was when I noticed that I had been shackled. Typically one would link those nearly-broken shackles at the hands and feet so they would not come apart, but as the chain that held everything together was shredded I was not limited in my motions. "...why am I shackled?"

Normally, innocent and just people should not get shackled. It was people who committed repeated crimes towards others or who could not clear out the suspicions held in their regards who would be.

This had to be a joke, I whispered as I tore off the remnants of the shackles. They easily came off, being nearly broken as they already were.

"Now then."

I rubbed my hurting joints and pushed forwards a body that felt all too heavy. It felt like the gears within myself had finally started rotating. To start feeling fulfilled by the likes of these things would be the end of a person, I thought, but, thinking more calmly, humanity was already over.

Let us do what we ought do.

For the sake of a decline that had at long last arrived.

I decided to try to sort through my memories as I walked.

It appeared that, whatever the reason, I had nearly perfect memories of my own name, the structure of my family, my job, and all those fundamental components. This issue ought be categorized as a short-term memory impairment. I had lost part of the history of my life, but I had not lost sight of who I was. It was only the recent memories of the past few hours. Only those seemed to have been completely cut off from the rest of my memories and had vanished without a trace. As for the cause of the loss of memories, I had no recollections, either.

Some sort of reason was at the source of my short-term memory impairment. And so it was obvious I would be thinking. Origin was unclear. I had no headache, so it did not appear that I had hit my head.

...life is so incomprehensible. That, though trite, was what I thought every single time things like these happened.

I knew who I was. But I could not calm down, for I had lost what I ought be doing. It was the core of a human being, something like the motivation for the heart.

But who was I in the first place?

If I was inclined to be fussier about the specifics, I could claim to be a public employee. It was an unmistakable fact that, as far as the documents went, I was affiliated with the UN specialized agency known as the UN Office of Mediation, and the gist of that would be that I was an international public employee. At least on some document somewhere on this planet. The work mainly involved dealing with the various problems between the former and new

humanity plus miscellany, it was a prestigious job that required contributing to the community in many ways. As far as what I had been doing, I had been excavating / preserving lost knowledge, recovering / managing dangerous items, laying the groundwork for interactions between the two races, helping other departments, setting up as well as defending meeting places, distributing fliers, counseling in matters of livelihood, etcetera.

As for whether a job this harsh had a suitable remuneration, that was dubious. Or rather, the principle of international money had vanished in the present times, which at this point had no politically approved currency, so wages factually did not exist. One could not give what one did not have (AKA everybody was broke). The blessing of highly developed sciences and technologies allowed some level of abundance in the production of foodstuff, leading to rationing tickets being preferentially issued so that they could be used in manners close to the currencies of old, but as far the system went, I was under the welfare system.

In short, I was unpaid.

Praise and criticism came in equal measure for currency systems, of course, but it was a convincingly ideal type of remuneration. Having adventures every single last time without reward would be much too hard on me. And I had adventures just every single time. A life of non-stop adventures that was quite uncalled for. However, as you can see, even today I was forcefully and austere motivating myself as if it had been my duty to move my flesh and blood body towards this.

In the end, that was my nature.

It was not just a matter of being comparatively suited to the job. I really had a duty, I really felt that. Whatever else I may have or would be saying, I really loved my job. I did not believe that the reason why I continued contributing to the community despite all my complaints laid anywhere else.

I had to gather information.

I not only needed to regain the memories of the last few hours, but the reason why that loss happened, its circumstances, its consequences and, alongside the memories, I also needed to regain that mission that had vanished far in the distance, leaving only impatience behind. After a short while I discovered a building. Easily, unlike what I expected.

A low artificial silhouette clung close to an area right next to a lenient hill. From a distance it looked like a shed. I changed my path towards that direction.

Moonlight pressed on the shadows of darkness down here on the land, making for a definite contrast with the clear light of the heavens. I was soaked into the night like I had black water up to the waist as I headed towards an angular shadow that projected out like a section of an iceberg pushing forwards. The houses were seemingly located much closer than the impression I had of them, so I arrived at the first home in about the time it took for me to have a tea break.

It was indeed crummy, but it was a scrupulously well-maintained shed. There was glass installed in the windows and I could see that the fence had been mended. I tried quietly knocking on the door. The hinges burst off with a sound pregnant with ill omens and the door itself went falling on the opposite side. My thoughts came to stop because of how preposterous that was, but, happily or whatever it may be, the resident did not rush at me in anger. There was no one inside the shed.

"Owchies!"

As I was trying to enter the house I bumped my forehead into the door's frame.

No matter how tall I was as a girl, I should not have been that sky-high. Something felt off. It was like I was having a dream that resembled reality. Like I was not properly seeing what

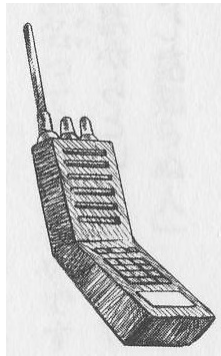
appeared before my eyes. I felt somewhat creeped out, so I slumped over and looked around the room just with my head.

This was a cramped shed. The ceiling was all too low, and the impression the interior left me was that it was quite difficult to breathe inside. I would never have thought I would enter a room such as this. It was a weird house, build sitting on its own out in the wilderness outside human villages.

Feeling somewhat chilly, I gave up all plans to rest and decided to just borrow whatever resources I needed. The house had a stock of food, water, alcoholics, and the sort. For the purpose of borrowing things during this state of emergency I left a memo written behind. I only needed to return them later.

I heard an usual electric sound.

I had heard it from the lower half of my body. As I checked I found that there was a device I had no memories of fastened to my belt. I did not quite know why, but I had a feeling that it was something of a communication device.



"Uhm, how do you use it..."

I fumbled with it and the call went through.

"○×△□?"

I was spoken to with words I did not understand.

"Excuse me, I do not understand. What are you talking about?"

Being monolingual I could only answer with the words I knew.

The speaker fell silent then, a little while later, said this in words I could understand.

"...who are you?! Answer, quick!"

Imperative, then. That so, then.

Reception had worsened and the person's voice was not clear. However it was not just because this person was overwhelming, it was like I could not even feel humanity from this person.

"That is what I should be saying. Who are you, yourself? How rude!"

A reply came after a brief wait.

"Rude, is that what you said?"

"Yes, I did indeed say that. It does feel rude for me to say this to someone I am speaking to for the first time, but you are indeed a bit rude, you are."

I felt that the interlocutor was now at a loss for words.

After all, you do understand? Using that tone with someone you are speaking with for the first time, truly.

"May I ask you not to forget politeness when you are the one requesting a communication?"

"What, seriously, who are you?"

"I am the one who asked you!"

I tried stating that forcibly and, another moment later,

"Are you making fun of me?"

Almost instinctively I began hating this person. I could not explain the reason, however they just irritated me utterly. Nothing like that had happened in quite a while. Not someone who made me this angry. Should I actually transform, instead? To the second stage? Like a comic book hero? Should I use a power level over ten thousand?

...I tried to convey these things as amicably as possible, however it may have come to nothing. The result was that what did come through was quite the mess.

The speaker fell completely silent.

I wanted to end this mentally speaking not good conversation as quickly as possible.

"I am hanging up."

"Wait. It's top priority that you tell me this. Where are you?"

"I have no duty to tell you."

"Duty? Did you just say duty?"

"Did I, now. Maybe I was talking about a type of tax, you see. Farewell, mister unknown person."

I did not quite believe that, properly speaking, something like that should ever be said to someone face to face.

But, on the network, I could be as bullish as I pleased. Anonymity was amazing, was it not.

"Wait! Calm down! This is important, listen up!"

"I refuse all your orders. Goodbye."

"At least don't move from there! I'll come pick you—"

I had no ears to listen with. I cut the conversation without waiting for a reply.

I did not understand where I was in the first place. And I did not want to be picked up by people I did not know.

A call came again immediately, but once I ignored that, they gave up.

"Victory."

Well, that may have been a chance to obtain information, but there was nothing to be done about past things. I had never felt something being more off than that not even once before in my life. I had neither been provoked nor insulted, I merely felt a reflexive hatred well up in me. I really, really, really hated that person, indeed.

I supposed that things like these would happen.

For example, the first time I met Y I felt hostility from her from the beginning, which did not give me a good impression of her, but that was incomparable to this.

"...perhaps I should dispose of it."

But it was possible that I was going to be called by someone who had better knowledge about all this.

I thought for a moment and decided not to dispose of it.

"I must first of all return to the Village."

Returning home was top priority. Next came sorting through and understanding the situation.

Third came dealing with it.

My motivation was boundless.

The journey through the wildernesses reached its end around the fourth day.

I had wandered for four days, and that was how I had managed to determine the location of

the Village. The majority of the reason was me finding, on the way, a discarded machine that had the map data of the surrounding areas. Of course, being an abandoned machine there were visible gaps in the data, however, analyzing multiple similar data I had managed to restore things to a fair level of accuracy, if not to perfection. In this era information technology was treated as a thing of the past, but I had still learned as much as I could.

The forced march pushed me physically to my limits, but psychologically I was satisfied.

Thinking back on that, I might have been quite lazy before then. I did not find the way I always only did the absolute minimum to be laudable.

To me, a task was to be my own self, I expected each of them to be my very identity. But I had this feeling that, before that moment, I had all too easily succumbed to laziness.

That was maybe not the right thing to do, I wondered.

But I had to do my best, I told myself.

I was surprised. I could not believe that I unconsciously had feelings this dynamic laying in wait underneath my listlessness. Having lost my latest memories, a certain type of

psychological weight lifted, and these primitive thoughts I was having came to the surface...

With the exception of the time I had lost, no matter how much I consulted my personal history,

I could not find an image of a 'me' this passionate. Of course I did not have every detail in memory and I could not draw an exact conclusion with regards to this issue, but at present, the person I was had all these concealed intentions that would normally never surface.

I was happy. I had this notion that this past self of mine, who made every effort to do her best regardless of appearances, was somewhat embarrassing. But things were going to change from this day.

From this day hence a new stage was going to begin for me.

I was excited.

I pushed my way through a standing tree about the height of my hips and moved faster.

Kusunoki Village awaited me just ahead.

Kusunoki Village had been destroyed.

No, it was not a joke. I did not add a LOL or something at the end of that.

"W-, what is going on here?"

A the majority of the residences had either been turned into powder or destroyed, meaning the beautiful fences and stone walls that ran alongside the paths were broken down in places.

It appeared that a rolling pin more massive than a house had been allowed to roam around, creating this present situation where only a limited number of houses, and a low one at that, had escaped the whimsical course of this destroyer.

I could not see anyone moving around. Forget livestock sheep or chicken, there was not a single bird flying in the sky. Something far beyond the imaginable had struck the Village.

Investigating closely I found that the damage was not limited to the buildings.

Cobblestones were missing, the thickets that had been there before had vanished, large trees had been toppled and blocked the path. Feeling that something was off I looked up and found that, on top of a oak tree, there was a cart impaled there like a shrike used as butcher-bird of prey, it was like a bad joke.

Tornadoes on a destructive scale would sometimes cause victims. Was Grandfather safe?

What about Assistant-san? What about my friends, my acquaintances, my neighbors?

I had at present no way to know.

Leaving the worries about people for later, I was going to first of all focus on solving the material issues.

Even the place where my house was had become an empty lot.

"Mh?"

Unlike the other houses, which had been smashed from above, mine had vanished without leaving a trace. Only the floor and the furniture were scattered about as they were around the lot. It was a scene like a surreal painting. I could simply not understand any of this.

I suddenly shot a glance at my side and spotted my house there. Right there, where there was once the house of my neighbor.

"What?!"

My house had moved to the spot where my neighbor's house had been.

This could not happen. Anyone, seeing this, would say that it could not happen. Where did the neighbor's house go, then? I found the answer right away. It laid on its side nearby, smashed. It was like my house had shot the neighbor's house away like a ball in billiards.

"Bwah... but this...!"

I had the feeling that something like an unbelievable destructive force had to have cast that house on its side. As proof that something like that had happened, my house had large cracks, and not just in the walls, even in the floors. I had heard that even real tornadoes could uproot houses, but I was shocked to find that something this comedic would happen in reality.

"Grandfather, you are not in there, are you?"

The wrecked house was devoid of people. There was no trace of people in any of the neighboring houses. I did not believe they had failed to evacuate when faced with such a calamity, still I was somewhat worried.

I headed to the evacuation place, the Cultural Center. Just in case, since it was possible it could have been used as a place of evacuation. However, once I reached the location, I gasped. I found that the Cultural Center itself had also been completely destroyed.

"Just... what is the meaning of this..."

The situation had now become serious.

The Village had been destroyed, I could not be sure that anyone was alive, I could not be sure that anyone was dead, and all of this had a cause that I did not know.

I wanted to scratch my head. Forget my duties, things like these put my very existence in danger.

Existence. I used to be merely existing.

How hollow that was. As far as the mere act of living, that wild grass over there was doing the same. For mankind to live, they needed to have a meaning. Although the meaning of a life was to be determined by the self, that only made for a foundation of true living.

I did not feel attracted to that idle biological life with neither advantages nor disadvantages. Was I going to not even treasure my life, now...

I made a round of the Village, and, by the time I had made sure there was no one there, I had managed to regain my composure.

Whether it was a tornado or not, there was no mistake that a massive disaster had befallen the Village. I could not find traces of anything, but the possibility that the residents had evacuated seemed high.

What bothered me was how the whole of the Village had been engraved with the scars of gruesome destruction. There were traces of having been literally destroyed into the smallest possible parts by claws.

"...was it a monster?"

Unbelievable. Yes, but, well, it may have been plausible...

Right then, something small cut across the corner of my eye. I only saw it for a brief moment,

but that tiny and nimble creature was a fairy, no mistake.

"Ah, hey, you over there!"

I called them over and the two tiny figures showed themselves from a gap in the ruins. They were indeed fairies.

"What is it?" "Who are you?"

These two did not seem to know about me.

"I am a human. I am pleased to meet you."

"A... human...?" "A human, the ones from the rumors, huh..."



The two seemed tense as they looked up at me.

They felt somewhat dazed and their clothes were a little bit tattered. It was rare for fairies to be tired, however.

"Excuse me, I apologize for being so sudden. I would like to know what has happened in the village, do you know anything, perhaps?"

The two fairies looked at each other and simultaneously faced back towards me.

"Something?"

"The reason why everything was destroyed."

"It was destroyed?"

"It is as you can see. Look, it was wrecked quite thoroughly."

The fairies were confused.

"The destruction is only moderate?" "Housekeeping could solve this?"

"You people really have no sense of danger, indeed..."

"All 'cause we were put on standby." "We just did a restart?"

The two said they had been asleep, so they did not know what happened.

It appeared that even what for humans was a severe calamity to fairies, who surpassed physics, was nothing particularly important.

"Then, do you know where the people have taken refuge in, perhaps?"

"Well, we can only go down the paths we usually go down."

"I see..."

These fairies were somewhat dazed. People who did not have drive or lacked the willpower had to exist, too.

Regardless, I felt weak. I used to rely on fairies in times of trouble, but this time it seemed that would not work.

These two seemed docile, but normal fairies had cheerful personalities, whenever there was something fun they would subdivide or call friends, and in the end endlessly expanded their influence, something of theirs that could become problematic. The more their numbers increased the more easily problems occurred, although, in the end, definitive tragedies were averted.

Wherever fairies resided in large numbers there was never any time to stop paying attention, that was what it meant.

The fairies disappeared as soon as I took my eyes off of them.

An odd sound approached me. This had to be what had startled the fairies. I could tell that the sound was approaching from how the ground was shaking. It was not to the extent of an earthquake, I felt weakly at my feet the vibration caused by something hard striking the ground. Immediately afterwards the sound that was connected to the vibration reached my ear.

I had heard that sound before. I had experienced something similar somewhere. I tried sorting through my memories and recalled that it was the sound of a tank.

"...this is not good."

A peculiar driving sound had already arrived at me. As all the standing building had been destroyed I had nowhere to hide myself. I could only stand stock still in this situation where I had no decent way to deal with whatever was going to happen.

Eventually a bulky armored vehicle made its majestic entrance from beyond a somewhat tall hill.

The angular frame had a heavy-looking gun turret which itself had an angular-looking and manly barrel coming out of it. Even as I tried to describe it in the style of an educational program in order to escape from reality, that was a Fighting Vehicle, and that did not erase its dignified and destructive image. I had neither physical nor mental avenues of escape, it was quite nasty.

The tank, which had encamped itself up the hill, suddenly fired its main gun.

"Hyeeeh!"

I rushed to hide myself behind a nearby ruin. However, it was clear that there was nearly no point trying to find protection by hiding behind wreckage such as this. If these things had still been as before they were destroyed they would at least offer some protection. Some unknown god of destruction had cursed me.

The tank did not readily fire any second shot.

...although I expected it could turn me into fine mist alongside the wreckage.

I fearfully tried to jut my head out from my concealment and realized why that had happened.

The cannon's barrel had been destroyed. It was thinkable that when it fired the first round it self-destructed. I did not expect it to fire any further rounds.

I now had hope.

It was possible that the entity that had actually destroyed the fairy-tale scenery that was Kusunoki Village had been that tank. However, how come something like that had appeared out of nowhere?

There were only things that I could not understand, I was utterly stuck.

As I could not expect the fairies to mitigate this dangerous situation, the smartest thing to do was to get out of there. The tank did not seem to have a secondary cannon, so I set myself out to run away with all my strength.

It was sad to get away from the Village which I had spent so many difficulties returning to, but there was nothing to be done about it. It did not feel like the tank would try to chase me without a cannon, in fact it seemed that it was not going to move from the top of the hill. Run away, run away!

As I had run down partway through the path of my fleeing I, suddenly, received a call. What timing that had to have, seriously. Perhaps I was seeking an escape from this blocked situation, regardless I reflexively answered the call.

"I am busy right now."

Pride forced me to say that line.

"Why did you go back to Kusunoki Village, answer me NOW!"

Again that imperative person.

"I refuse."

"Why are you so hostile, answer us now!"

"Noppity nope nope."

"Your attitude is way too insulting!"

"Then please stop it with the imperative."

"...we can't do that, what do you think?"

No matter how much we spoke we seemed to be unable to even exchange data, meaning I could see that we were naturally incompatible. Maybe, definitely, absolutely, I decided for it to be so.

"Whatever, just avoid putting yourself in danger. And whatever you do, do not move!"

"You do not quite understand this situation, you do not. I might come to die if I do not move, you know?"

"We can monitor your situation to some extent. We hope that you can stay there around the Village."

"Around the Village, you say, meaning..."

I proposed several locations that I knew well.

"Right! Wait right there! We'll come pick you up!"

"...may I ask a question?"

"Go ahead."

"Who are you?"

"We can't answer that right now."

"Could you answer me some other time?"

"That's possible."

Always making me wait about every possible thing, truly...

"Please tell me why Kusunoki Village has become like that."

The silence right then was even heavier and longer than usual.

"...say why you want to know that."

"Well, I am curious about the reason why my hometown has been destroyed, you see?"

"Wait, did you just say hometown?"

"It is a fact."

My interlocutor once again fell silent, so I added this.

"I am also worried about the safety of my Grandfather's colleagues. If you really belong to the Cultural Preservation Project staff, then could you be participating to that as well?"

"Wait, did you say Grandfather?"

"Please stop dodging the question already!"

This person kept dodging the question, I did not feel like he would ever be in the mood for a proper answer. My patience was at its limits.

"Calm down. We will answer all questions we can answer," was what my interlocutor said after a long while. "As for the destruction of the Village, it's been decided to not tell you. We can say that the people that were close to you are safe."

"Do you have any proof of that?"

"We do. However, we can't provide you with it, that's all."

"Please turn over whoever did this to me. I can do without Grandfather and Assistant-san for the moment."

"We can't do that."

"Why?"

"Because we can't trust you."

I felt like I had hit a window.

"Then you should not have bothered to call me."

"We couldn't do that. Our data is also incomplete. We need to share our respective situations. You must wait there! We'll join up with you!"

"I do not want that!"

I hung up leaving no room for replies.

As always, I just could not deal with this person.

I somehow felt that people had no hearts. That they were all cool-headed aliens that could not feel the pains of the heart. They felt like they lived in another planet despite being on the same Earth.

Awww, no good, no good.

I suddenly thought about destroying the communication device. As long as I did not have this

communication device, that unpleasant caller would no longer be able to communicate with me. At the same time, however, I would lose all avenues of obtaining information. In the end I decided not to destroy it. Destroying it would have been simple, but it was the avenue for precious information.

The interlocutor was unpleasant, but I only needed to not answer his call for a while.

Still... what was I going to do next?

Where would be any evacuation location?

I stared at the map as I dazedly thought about what to do next.

I thought about the advantageous possibilities of dropping by the neighboring villages.

However, they were quite a distance away, and I did not want to be burdened with the risk of making that voyage alone.

I could have easily had the Salvation Army caravan pick me up, but although I more or less knew the evacuation routes, I could not reliably wait for something that did not come in every day. Worst came to worst, I would end up waiting out in the wilds for several days.

At the end of my investigation, I decided to head for the nearest village.

It was a two day march, it was. I rationed it so I did have food, but this was truly something I wished I did not have to do.

Around sunset I spotted an appropriate ruin in which I could make camp.

There was nothing on the map, but this used to be a city in the ancient past. I could not tell the addresses or the streets, however right now they were just empty pieces of ground covered in grass where nobody resided.

It was not rare to find lands weathered by the elements scattered through the cities. Since the mankind of old wanted to fully fill the land, that was natural.

Clustered in what seemed to be a plaza that used to be a square, there were tiny figures that, as soon as I came by, fled in all directions. Perhaps mice, perhaps something else.

As the majority of the buildings had burned down or naturally collapsed, only the foundations just about managed to remain. Because of that there was nearly nothing that obstructed the sight, it felt nice. What caught my eyes was a half-destroyed stone church with its interior exposed. It had a shape like a hollowed-out walnut shell and, not being bad as a shelter against rain and dew, I decided to rest there for the night.

As soon as I went below its roof rain, and with perfect timing, it started pouring. This rain that fell so suddenly repeatedly went between being strong and weak, and for instants the world was painted gray.

With nothing to do I sat cross-legged near the base of the church's roof, gazed at the scene, and forced myself to think over the matters I had deferred.

I still felt the urge, it had not disappeared, it only smoldered.

Was it possible that I had anticipated the destruction of the Village and was working hard to prevent it?

Was the regret for that remaining like this, as a scald on the heart?

...I did not think so.

No, it was merely a question of probability.

In short, unless the fairies were involved, there should have been no reason for me to be acting on my own.

Besides, bringing out a tank to come destroy the Village would be much too malignant, it would have been far too removed from the usual *modus operandi* of the fairies. This was the doing of humans.

What an outrageous event. The world being the world it was, this would have been concluded as terrorism, indeed.

Those behind that would have to be put in the slammer, indeed.

Rebuilding the Village looked like it would prove quite difficult. Although things would eventually get done so long as there were no deaths, the Village would be gone for some time longer. Imagining that peaceful yet hectic scene, I felt a satisfied peacefulness.

The rain ceased in the blink of an eye, the clouds cleared away, and a surprisingly bright night illuminated my surroundings. The chill air was pleasant and the air was so clear it felt like the I could see everything. Far in the distance there was this one remaining pillar standing vertically. Receiving the evening sun as it had sunk low, it laid down a crisp diagonal shadow. It was like a magnificent spire that had been engraved with the history of all eternity.

"..."

I had seen something similar before. But it did not remain as a clear image in my memories, it instead left me with the impression of being a crystallized remnant. I directed my memories to it and the crystal shattered and, in that very instant, part of the memories I had lost in the realm of my unconscious resurfaced.

I had been engaging in important work until a week before.

Right after finishing that job I lost my memories and came to wander the wildernesses.

Supposing something big was moving, then it was going to happen soon. It did not appear that I had recalled everything. The more specific scenes... were still covered in that veil that had fallen on them the instant I came to receive that shock.

As for the means to investigate them... I lacked a single one.

I received a call on the transmission device.

"Why did you move around without permission? Tell us where you are! NOW!"

"I do not want to."

"If you're saying you're reluctant to be picked up, you can still come yourself."

"I dooo nooot waaant tooo!"

"...you're out of line. If you've lost your cool then you should obey our order to show up posthaste."

"I am calm. You are the one who is being impatient, you know?"

"Why do you think that!"

"My memories have returned. And that is why I now know who you are."

"If you just showed up then you wouldn't need to make piles of pointless guesses about our identity."

"But if it ends with me captured I will never be free again, you see?"

There was silence.

"There, I hit the mark."

"I deny that. There's just communication problems, we just can't hold an unobstructed conversation!"

"You are dodging the question."

"It's the truth!"

"You only needed time to choose your words correctly in order to ensure that you do not give me too much information during this transmission."

"...you're surprising."

I had a feeling like the voice of this interlocutor of mine had, for the first time, an emotion to it different from that initial irritation.

"So you're able to make psychological evaluations of that high a level, huh. Honestly I was

contemptuous of you, I thought you an unpracticed little girl."

"Thaaank you very much," then I added this. "May I make a further high level speculation? You are UN staff, are you?"

"...was that in your recalled memories?"

I said yes.

"It's as you say. And both you and we share a job. Do you remember hearing the term, Cultural Preservation Project? We're that."

Ahhh, as I thought, that was what it was.

The UN Cultural Preservation Project...

That was the formal name of the organization that worked on the People Monument Construction Project.

It was an internal UN organization established as a support unit. But while it may have been so, in the world of today it could not be on a particularly large scale.

Although it had a core of specialists in various fields, those people had plenty of other work and could only concentrate on the task for a few hours at a time, or, to put it in other words, *"got nothing else't'do, guess I'll Monu that Ment a little..."*, that was the extent of the Project. Except this Project that had proceeded so leisurely had suddenly begun moving forwards in earnest.

The Project was to gather / record human history and their arts, skills, and techniques in order to bequeath them to the world to come, so the premise was that it would be updated on a long-term basis. As the records of humanity that we had at present were incomplete (and they were never going to be complete), there was no point in making things proceed in any sort of haste, or so it had been concluded, but the situation had now changed radically.

That was because the aging of specialists had been seen as a problem in these last years. The generation of my Grandfather, who was recognized as the last generation of specialists, was, at the same time, called the last gasp of humanity. Once they disappeared, even the things that mankind had barely managed to do until then will be gone, that was what I had been hearing. My Grandfather's generation had not bequeathed that knowledge to the following generations.

Initially it was a plan that focused on preserving human history for the fairies to come, however, it seems that, in order to ensure it would become a database useful even for the remaining mankind of somewhen, some degree of course correction had been performed. And because of that, the completion of the main recording device that that Monument had become a priority... and, well, that was more or less what happened.

What was sought was a Monument built with current technologies in order to have the highest capabilities so as to be able to store knowledge without limitations. And that had been achieved.

Not long ago, if my memory was accurate.

"...now that I say it, headquarters dispatched people in order to get the project to go somewhere."

The construction's production staff, composed by me, Y, specialists from every land, and a few groups of engineers managed to complete it. I believed this self-evident, but the work for underlings such as us were all odd jobs.

On the one hand, the new Cultural Preservation Project staff was comprised entirely by personnel that had, until then, merely managed a variety of errands carried out in the form of odd jobs, but who had come there to supervise. The previously existing members all as once said *what disgusting people* about them. People who came later to inspect progress were

rarely welcomed on the site. They were a group of stereotypical black-suited superficially-polite-but-actually-rude people.

That sort of enmity had nothing to do with us, who had been dispensed from doing odd jobs ever since they had come, but that also ended today.

"Still, it is a nice thing."

"Nice? Say why!"

"Well, being sacrificed by someone I am acquainted with would make it difficult for me to wake up or go to bed. There is no need to worry about that with newcomers like you."

Silence.

"Still, we are the same on this, are we? After all, I do not believe you will in any way oppose making a sacrifice out of me."

"A sacrifice, you say, why did you conclude that joining with us is dangerous? I don't think you have any basis for that!"

"You require someone to be taken as responsible for the scandalous destruction of the Village, right?"

That was a trick. My memories had not recovered to that extent.

The people of the Cultural Preservation Project made a mistake and it ended with the destruction of the Village... that was the scenario I had hypothesized, however I had no way to make sure that it was the truth. Maybe I was involved with that somehow?

And in the end, my interlocutor's answer was...

"I can't ignore how you said 'sacrifice'. You know about the facts and therefore are an important person, but we haven't decided how to treat you after this."

"As I am afraid that 'important' = 'culprit', I cannot show up."

"Then our conversations are running on parallel lines."

"That is correct."

"What're you going to accomplish by not showing up?"

This time, it was my turn to be pushed into silence.

Was there anything I could have done on my own?

I realized that, at that point, I could have done nothing but bet on the blank parts of the memories that remained to me.

It was possible that the truth about the destruction of the Village laid there.

I hung up without words and compared my regained memories with the conversation I had just had.

"...this is about the Monument."

The great work that had shattered my heart was that. Something had happened during that job and the records of my life had interrupted.

And since then – I did not expect it to have been that long a time – I had wandered the wilderness, that was what it was going to have happened. I had been bound hands and feet, had a communications device for whatever reason, and was being chased by the project's staff.

I had been running away, maybe.

And that was because, for some reason, I had been restrained.

Had I perhaps done something worth being restrained for? I expected that to have something to do with the destruction of the Village, but... no matter how much I poked around this, it was indeed the case that a single woman's hands had destroyed the Village.

Since it was controlled by an intact AI that had happened to have been discarded before, could I have accidentally flipped a switch that caused imperfection in its thinking, and made it

run rampant with a tank?

"Would I ever do something that careless?"

That was a silly delusion.

The main point was how I had run away.

As long as I did not feel guilt within my heart, I did not believe I would choose, of all things, to run away. ...would I?

"I knew that I was innocent, so I ran away since I believed I would have been falsely charged."

Was it not natural to think like that?

Rather, there would have been nothing more dangerous than not thinking that.

I could only believe that I was innocent.

"Very well, let us invade."

Onwards to the People Monument construction site.

I believed I had gone there right before losing my memories.

I had to go there, investigate, and prove my innocence. The Cultural Preservation Project was (I believed) going to blame someone and they had to be indicted.

That was my decision.

For all that, I had been through quite a few rough times.

I believed I had survived about six volumes worth of adventures.

Between all of them I had become skilled at survival. I was confident about my survivability. I had to find it within myself to survive.

I set myself up with a route to sneak through the Village and headed for the site where the Monument was going to be built.

"There she is! It's her!"

I was found.

"Stop! Stop or we're gonna shoot!"

People in black clothes appeared from the ruins and scattered about, coming to shoot at me. With pistols!

There was nothing more unsuitable to a fairy tale, indeed. It was unbelievably violent of them. I have heard rumors that being shot with a pistol hurts. It was terrifying. My good luck, however, had me seemingly not hit by a single bullet fired my way.

"You big meanies!"

I ran back towards safety while crying.

"I was found out because I did not disguise myself."

That was the sole conclusion.

They were pros. No, they looked like pros (I did not believe they worked mainly as covert agents, strictly speaking, but for this occasion it did not matter).

The best way to deal with this was to use camouflage.

It was difficult to obtain camouflage, however, rummaging through the uninhabited historical ruins located nearby, I did manage to find a single set of clothes that was acceptable for use.

I wore it and attempted my infiltration through a different route.

"There she is! It's her!"

I was found.

"Bwaaah! Shoot!" "I c-, can't hit her! Guns are hard!" "Don't hit her! It won't be good for us if we don't bring 'er in in one piece!" "T-, that's right, that's true!" "But it's possible we'll hit her by accident..."

They were pro-like only in their looks, within themselves they were mere amateurs.

"Bullets ain't coming out!"

"...that's not a real one, it's just an airsoft gun, ain't it? It's got Made in Japan written on it."

"That's ridiculous!"

...so that was how silly these people were.

And I so hoped that they would be deceived by my disguise. Meanies.

Regardless, there was nothing scarier than amateurs poorly handling guns. By the time a branch at the side of my head flew off with a crack I felt more than a bit of a chill.

"You monsters!"

I ran back towards the ruins while crying.

I could do nothing but significantly change my route.

Until now I had avoided dangerous geographical features such as valleys or woods, heading exclusively through flat lands to approach the Village. That was why my course was easy to guess, or so went my supposition.

This time I planned to pass through the woods.

Though I called them 'woods', some were natural while others formed by happenstance in metropolitan ruins, there were two quite separate types. The former were natural woods, the later were called forested sites.

They were equally dangerous. Regardless, I chose the one where chunks of concrete would not fall without warning from above my head.

I did not know the specifics, still, what was it? The Records of the Three Kingdoms or something? Something on those lines, an event that introduced a supertechnique in a war, the pattern most often seen in those sorts had people attack from difficult terrains, right? That was what I wanted to go with, that sort of feeling.

"There she is! The annoying girl is here!"

About thirty people in black clothes showed up, firing guns bang-bang-bang in a magnificent chorus.

"DEMOOONS!"

I ran back while crying.

...there was an absurd number of people in the Cultural Preservation Project's staff.

I did not even recall that there were that many, truly.

"Humanity is still doing quite well... for now..."

It was like something massive that had been unhurriedly whittled down. The decline was also gentle and slow.

No matter which route I went down, it was certain that I would be found. To resolve this I might have to resort to a diversion.

Preparations were quite problematic.

First of all I had to ransack the ruins and secure a ladies' mannequin. I wound up some cloth scraps that sort of looked like clothes, I obviously found nothing as convenient as a wig, so I fastened some rotten branches to my head. From far away I would not have been seen as a person... hopefully.

While I was working I suddenly felt like I was doing something quite silly and felt the blues.

Doing something this stupid on my own was simply much too hollow. Awww, I wondered where Assistant-san could have been?

As I went and finished work I found a monster in the shape of a person standing right before

my eyes.

The creature, clad in cloth scraps, growing rotten branches from the head, had facial features like an earthenware doll, and was far removed from the category of 'human'. Even from a kilometer away it was obvious that this was an apparition, so forget about diversions, it showing up alone on its own felt like it would have had an intimidating effect.

...was it even worth using this?

"Let us drop diversion."

Well then, how was I going to do this?

"I have no idea."

I wanted to somehow manage to surreptitiously sneak into the actual location where the Monument was going to be built. I came to think that that was going to be terribly difficult. Inferring from the tight security, the surveillance network was unlikely to loosen even deep into the night.

I could not carry out a diversion. Nor could I alter my route. Nothing I could do would work.

"...my head is getting blurry. That is no good."

No matter how good the plans I made and improved were, at present I was unlikely to be blessed by a good solution.

At times like these I had to waste time to improve my mood, and in order to do that I just walked around every once in a while.

There was quite the fun to be had in living within these things called ruins.

In particular, in the majority of underground streets and underground rooms, which were favored by not being touched by sunlight or by the elements, there were many items in good condition preserved there. Ancient rooms were like presents from the past.

"Now then, which shall I open today, I wonder."

In the several days in which I resided there I came to make it some sort of rule to discover these underground rooms.

Speaking from experience, rather than the public underground facilities provided by governments and business, it was the civilian underground rooms where the majority of the most interesting things seemed to be sleeping.

Also, the majority of the underground rooms were locked, however the ones that were built simply I managed to easily unlock. *What're we gonna do with you if that's the only sort of stuff you become skilled at*, I felt that Grandfather would say. And, at times, all it took to wreck a ceiling was taking a single step inside. Far more than one or two hundred years of time must have passed over and through this city, indeed.

"...hmpf, feels like she'd be around here."

For some reason, it appeared that I had been found again.

The parts of the building that were over the ground had seemingly become mere pillars due to weathering, and I did not believe that the destruction would continue underground. Although I found the base of the stairs that led below, they were buried by a cave-in, meaning I could no longer use them as passage.

"It would of course be too back-breaking to dig them out."

I was wandering about wondering about what to do when I fell in a hole and emitted an old lady-like "*hyeEEh!*" of a shrill shriek.

"...t-,that was scary..."

I expected it was a silly scene.

That was because I had been buried into the ground all the way to the waist and was making a face like a pigeon's that had taken a hit from a peashooter.

Although it was a hole, it did not seem to be quite that deep.

The place from where I had fallen was about a meter higher. That was why I could touch with my feet.

It was sloping, stiff, and had quite the width. A wall had fallen such as to close up this space, then earth and sand came to bury it fully, creating a natural pitfall trap.

When I tried to remove the building materials I found that it had formed something of a short slope. It had enough width that two horse-drawn carriages could pass past each other.

Further down, as the path the ground began being flat, something like a shutter came to block the road ahead.

It did not seem to be locked, so I managed to easily open it by hand.

That space preserved since times past poked me in the nose. It smelled of rusted iron.

The dimly lit and bleak scene of this ashen gray space had cars and bicycles scattered about. All of them were in an advanced state of corrosion and in no condition to be used.

"Mh-hm, so this is an underground garage, then."

It did not seem dangerous, so I tried going within.

Besides the remnants of cars and bikes, there were the maintenance tools for each, and components and cord-type things stood out as they laid on the floor. There was a desk next to the wall that had, for whatever reason, many complicated computers installed.

They appeared to be computers for personal use. There were many different types.

There were notebook types, tower types, tablet types, hand-held types, dome types, clock types, goggle types, well, many types, I could tell. The hobbies of the people who were here seemed to be cars, bikes, and computers, that was what it felt like. There was even a fridge in the corner, which spoke of how the owners spent leisurely times here engaged in their hobbies.

Among all these things was, as expectable, the computers that were on my mind, rather than the remnants of the vehicles. I examined them one by one, but there was no electricity. Well, that was what was going to be, I supposed. Several machines lit up in their green-colored lamps for an instant, meaning their electricity storage modules were built-in, but none started up, they all fell silent.

I tried opening the refrigerator. I closed it right away. There was only this pile of stuff that proved that an amount of time that was normally unthinkable had passed.

"So we have gained nothing, have we?"

If I had to say what I could just barely manage to use, there was only some sort of construction tool still intact in its form that had fallen on the floor. And even with that I did not know what sort of degradation could have occurred within.

I did feel like it was just too bad about those computers near the wall.

If only I had not become involved in all of this, I would investigate the data of these precious electronic bequests.

Destroyed or not, the computer's memory device was either rotten or degraded, so I had no way to secure a reading of its contents. Although on the dawn of the day on which the People Monument would have been completed there would have been a need to pull together even this sort of data, the current situation did not permit that.

The overwhelming amount of data stored on the storage medium that was paper could be called the cornerstone of the compilation of human history. All sorts of electronic devices could be read for data, not only computers for personal use, meaning the People Monument Project could proceed without anything missing.

The first computers that mankind had built were, according to this one theory, said to have

been Atanasoft Belly Computers developed on AD 1949. Ever since then, the data and the information of this world rapidly began being taken over by computers.

"Even ruins this close to us would have had a point recovering, hard to believe."

If only I had not been a fugitive.

There was nothing else of note, however, as I was about to return outside, in the corner of my sights there surfaced a dazed, tiny figure. I pointed my eyes towards it. There was an immense number of them dwelling within the whole of these ruins.

"Oh dear me, there are fairies."

They were looking up at me with weak eyes.

"So that's how it was..." "Really..." "What a relief..."

Several fairies were living in the underground room. They said that they had been left there in the underground space.

"Were you locked within?"

"Yes..." "All along..." "For a whole day..." "Open twenty-four hours a day..."

"So you could not get out?"

The fairies nodded all as one.

If they had been under this collapse, then I did not expect that they would have been imprisoned for more than ten or twenty years. That question they answered with a '*dunno*' and a tilt of their heads in puzzlement.

At the very least, by the time I had explained that we were not enemies, but merely different species that could still be good neighbors, relief appeared on their faces at last.

"You are not in good health, are you."

"We're sorry we're alive..."

"What are you talking about?"

The feebleness of these fairies was that of the depression they had when they were bathed by too many electromagnetic waves.

"Still, since the entrance is open, you can go outside at any time."

The fairies spoke to each other in whispers.

A representative came forwards alone and said this.

"But what are we going to do outside?"

"I believe it better for you all to bathe in some sun in order to regain your health and good mood, still, well, you see. Wait, I have this problem... if you want to, would you be able to help me?"

"Help you...?"

The fairies once again confabulated.

"We'll do it."

"You will be so kind?"

I scattered about hopping fairies from my clothes' pockets. They seemed to have increased, as I found that were about fifteen when I counted them.

"Now then, what shall we do now?"

Although I did want to borrow the strength of the fairies to break into the village, they were debilitated and I would have felt guilty in working them too hard.

A fairy jutted out his head from my pocket.

"What about getting some friends?"

Yet another of those silly yet frequent requests from a fairy. In my heart I was the one making trouble for them, sprouting wings of a bat and a giant fork held in hand.

What was wrong about using fairy weaklings (FW) to my convenience?

My white self, reborn on the spot, was spitting saliva while flapping wings.

A fight began. The two grappled with each other, and the first in the ring to get a back-drop and eat mat was my white self.

"Let us do that, by all means."

When the Fairy Gauge was full, the impossible became possible. I did not think there was any reason for it not to be so. I heard that one could not buy one's way out of hardships, and that if one was a truly wise person, then one could turn the hardships around, repackage them, and gain significant profits from them. In situations like these, whoever had the eyesight required to see through to the demands of the hardships was determined victor.

I too wanted to become a truly wise woman.

I had decided my course of action.

It was just that, given that this territory had been wrecked to the last, even the faeries' efforts seemed to have weakened. We had to gather more people and make more merry or we will never be able to come out with the mood of always.

Luckily, urban resources (the recyclable materials) were the sole things sleeping there in abundance, meaning we lacked for nothing.

"Let us investigate."

"Investigate?"

"I would like to request someone to guide me."

"If you'll accept me..."

A different fairy jutted his head out from my pocked and rode on my shoulder.



"Where are we going first?"

"Right, this would be easier if we could find an ancient map. Generally, those are found in places such as business ruins or warehouses."

The curtain rose on the investigation.

On the way we were chased by the runaway tank in the underground subway system, which

was like a maze, lived together with robots, had philosophical talks with advanced molds, defused bombs in secret army facilities, and all that to summarize the things that happened. They were not the main point.

Anyway, fairies dwelt everywhere within the ruins.

To recover them I chucked them within my pockets, and even when, at that point, their number surpassed the hundred, the situation did not show any omens of improving.

"Depression..."

All the fairies were debilitated. Their usual spiritedness had lowered altogether too much, and they forgot the magics they were so proud of.

It was like a new company employee who had gotten the May Blues. Although I did not understand what language had become the basis of that, according to this legend, that new company employee who had gotten the May Blues had seemingly successfully resigned from his company. The term 'resignation' was an ancient word that meant escaping from an unpleasant place.

I did not know about the other two, 'new company employee' and 'May Blues', but judging from context, it was thinkable that the May Blues meant a healthy condition of the heart while New Company Employee meant a thief. In other words, unless one kept to one's heart and well, they would not be able to skillfully steal, meaning it was a saying for thieves.

I wanted the fairies to have the May Blues.

I vigorously thought that.

"When you fairies increase, magic-like things occur!"

"Magic?"

"Yes, and they might be actual magic."

"Magic... what's that?"

"Hmmm....," what to say to that. "It might be something that even you yourselves cannot understand."

"...and that's something we can do?"

The fairy in my pocket said that with some discomfort.

"You can, I am sure of it. You are just feeling poorly."

"I feel like I want to lend you my strength, master human."

"Thank you."

When I stroked his tiny head wrapped in downy hair with my fingertips, the fairy quickly came to emit a sleeper's breath.

Even I became quiet.

Although they were too much to bear when they were feeling too well, these sort of things were sad.

"Are you listening here? You people do not have enough vigor."

I gathered the fairies in the church and held a meeting.

"Vigor?" "Is this vigor happiness?" "I'm sure it's happiness, maybe." "Young people are out of touch with the world." "I want to become a fairy with high levels of consciousness."

"It is as you all say. Having low vigor is not a good thing. You people must do things like having a BBQ on the beach."

"Ehhh..." "That sounds hard..." "And we got told that we aren't getting along with things..."

"You must not be cowardly! Smile even if it is fake, as long as you have fun!"

"What is fun?"

"W-, well..."

They did not even know the basics...

"Inside your brain... there is a drug... it circulates... and it starts working, something like that?"

There was something like that written in some book.

"We're drugged?" "We're drugged drug-drugged?" "Are drugs hi-tension? "Can we live having fun with drugs?" "That might be preeetty simple."

This was bad, I had the feeling that I was just planting nonsense in their heads...

Awww, as I thought, my memories were in many fragments.

"A-, anyway, to raise your tensions you must party. There are no other ways except to party.

Let us all eat delicious things, make merry, and get the May Blues!"

We divided between each other the food that we gathered together in the ruins.

That being said, the only things that had been properly conserved was portable food in the shape of cubes.

"This is sweet?" "Sweetleicious delicious!" "Amazing flavor!"

Eaten together, even this tiny meal managed to fill us.

"Once we solve the current matter, I am going to treat you all to something more delicious, you see."

"Ah-waaayh!"

The fairies were happy and regained their smiles.

"Fun, is it this?" "If there's hope, then it might be fun!" "Suddenly, my hopes for life have reached the boiling point!" "Would this be better if we had drugs?"

"No drugs... even without them you'd be..."

"What?"

"Forget it. It was nothing whatsoever. Having fun is a good thing. No matter what you had to do to achieve it."

As the party ended, I spoke to the fairies.

About things so far, the job, and family.

And about all the mischief that the fairies scattered in the Village had perpetrated.

It was a meandering speech.

But they listened to everything like it was a novel thing for them to hear.

A while after finishing my speech, all the fairies did was to go, *"I feel so jealous"*.

"Not long now, that same thing will start with all of you."

That was a prediction that, to me, had no margin for doubt.

"Presenting the catch of the day!"

The fairy excavation team presented a variety of items before me.

"Today you also did quite well, I see."

Seeing the items piled up I gave a long nod.

While it was described as a ruin, there were still many things sleeping underground. Food, articles for business use, electric circuits, large-scale machines, electricity generators, water purification devices, and all kinds of raw materials such as rare metals. By using these recovered materials our work efficiency rapidly leaped upwards.

In the beginning we actually used to move supplies around with a trolley made of wood (or at least it was I who did so).

At present, in these ruins where there should have been no human besides me, transport vehicles loaded with materials were incessantly making round trips.

Alongside that, the fairies' conditions improved gradually.

Their facial features, which were seeping with debilitation, made a *sha-kin!*, their motions

grew quicker, their bent backs recovered, their bed hair got fixed, their eyes came to have something like a highlight, and their abilities improved visibly.

There were remarkable in their growth.

One of them would discover an innovative process, which promptly came to be shared by everybody else. And when somebody with heightened abilities devised new processes, techniques, and plans, they were also shared... the fairies were achieving exponential growth.

"This is the harvest for the day."

I was not playing around, I swear!

I tried opening a well-stuffed bag before the fairies to show them its contents. The fairies that had been recovered on that day hopped down from it.

"There's lots of friends!" "Sooo many today too!"

"It was a big haul."

"...where are we?" "...who are you people?" "...this is so scary..."

The just-harvested fairies all felt like that.

Once information sharing occurred I expected that they, with their abilities improved, would make for reassuring allies.

I gazed at the ruins from the church.

With the debris cleaned, in that area that had become an empty lot they were setting up a small workshop. That being said, they were only setting up machinery in a prefab, and the whole thing was as primitive as a textile mill just barely operating via a water wheel. Still, as long as we continued like this, we would be able to make use of even better systems, of course. The more we rebuilt all these things the more we accumulated materials and knowledge, meaning I could not help but be impressed.

"Once you all settle down a little bit more you will be able pay attention to the landscape, as well."

"Did you say landscape, your excellency?"

"What you can see of the town, I mean. I want it to be more like, well, more lyrical-like."

"Lyrical...?"

"Since we have a place this big, and there is this wide surface of greenery, we have this land demarcated by a net of stone walls, we could have houses riveting with originality dotted about, and between them there could be paths for horse carriages... like that, we would then have a cityscape that is like the world of fairy tales, do we not?"

"Are roads good things, your excellency?"

The navigator fairy, now firmly in his place on my shoulders, said this.

"They are quite good, they make navigation easy."

At this point, even the navigator fairy had become an expert about the ruins of this city.

They had perfected this system in which gathering information about the shortest routes and passageways was prioritized and updated daily.

"Now then, the device for paving pathways requires slate for the stone walls."

"Yes'mam, then we'll do as you wish!"

The navigator fairy took out a two-can-and-a-string telephone and spoke to the counter-weight that was another fairy, who then whispered a message back to him.



Suiting the nature of the fairies, the two-can-and-a-string telephone, up until now considered one of the main means of communication was expected to be likely to see a worsening in its efficiency if not gradually upgraded.

There were plenty of things to do.

The fairies, too, were none too far from being up to the job.

The more they upgraded things, the closer we got to breaking through to Kusunoki Village...

"..."

Right, that was the original objective.

A blunder had made me completely forget that.

My head was so busy supporting the local fairies that I forgot the main objective.

The fairies had made great strides, certainly.

However, that was not enough yet. They needed to be more overwhelming, more deceptive, more unfair, they had to use cheats, otherwise I had the feeling that their work could never be said to be the fairies'. What we were doing was certainly on a large scale, but, in the end, it was nothing more than hybridizing excavating technologies and existing skills in order to increase our efficiency.

This was not the high-instantaneous nonsense that they usually did.

Continuing like this we could not make even a single tank unable to stop us, could we not?

Suddenly, that communication device that I had ignored until then was on my mind.

The number of calls was so massive that I switched off the power supply. When I tried to start it up for the first time in a long while, a panel showed a list of several hundred incoming calls.

"..."

It was scary enough I had goosebumps.

With perfect timing a call came, and I was startled.

"...excuse me, that was scary, however."

"...so you're still alive?"

"Yes, although it is deeply regrettable, I have survived."

Although I was succeeding in building an empire, I did not say that.

"Stop doing pointless things and turn yourself in."

"Is that an order?"

"It is. We're higher in the chain of command, a request like that is expectable. The problem is with you continuing to ignore our demands."

"Because, you see, I do not wish to do it."

"And why?"

"Because when I opened my eyes I found myself released out in the wilderness, and suddenly I found myself even bound by restraints, and then, on top of all that, I found myself given one-sided and coercive orders, could I ever trust the person who did that?"

"That's because we got lots of stuff going on here, too."

"For the time being, I cannot meet with you before I have recovered my memories."

"When will your memories return?"

"Who knows, all I am able to say is that they will return when they will return."

"Your memories are unlikely to return."

That was an oddly conclusive way of saying things.

"Why do you say they are not going to return?"

"It is difficult to explain. For some reason you are mentally unstable. With a condition like yours, it's unlikely you'll be able to understand our complex problems."

...that angered me.

This person was lacking in delicacy all the way from the roots, indeed.

"You seem worried about being made into some human sacrifice, but that's a pointless worry. There's reasons why we can't do that. I'd like you to trust us and come over here."

"Then I would at least like to know why I have been bound in chains and cast out into the wildernesses."

"Well..."

My interlocutor suddenly became inarticulate.

"Those uncouth fetters were your work, were they?"

"...we must say yes."

"And they would be the most important reason why I cannot trust you, so... you can tell me to trust you without any explanation all you like, but I do not believe that will work. Would anyone actually believe that?"

"Our work is just that important."

"We are back on parallel lines. That is because I am unable to make any kind of judgment until I have identified the source of my memory loss."

"Well, it's a fact that there's things we need to prepare in order to take you in."

"I do not understand what you mean. What sort of things? Handcuffs, perhaps?"

What kind of fact would be so impossible for them to tell me unless I was restrained?

"Let's change topic. You dropped by the Village several times, why?"

If I told the truth and they became more guarded, this could become a problem.

I decided to tell a lie.

"It was because I felt like checking out whether my family was safe."

"That's the only question you answered without hesitation, I see."

...this person was much too sharp.

"Well..."

"By the way, a report has reached us that says there's suspicious movements located in the ruins northwest of here, do you have any idea what that's about?"

Inside myself I screamed out without a voice.

This was bad, I was going to be found out.

"Our empire is currently undergoing revolutionary growth, thus, however tremendous the force you may be able to wield may be, we have enough food and clothing to ensure an unimpeded life, also, and furthermore, we could also employ means of attacking that are fatal enough that

will end in your merciless destruction."

"Oi, the hell're you talking about?"

End transmission.

...awww, I hoped I had managed to trick him (sadface).

As always, just having a discussion with this person caused unpleasantness to linger in my heart and a feeling of depression to fall over me.

That being said, it was much too painful to have had my location determined.

The tank might come to attack us. If it did, with our current military strength we could offer no resistance.

But giving up the territory and moving away would also be difficult.

"Your Excellency, the rest of us are awaiting your orders."

"So it is my turn again, I see."

So far, it had always been my turn.

I had managed to strengthen internal politics with great ease. But it was not going to work again. The enemy's turn had begun.

"...we need weapons."

"What..."

My voice, which had lowered without me being conscious of it, made a fairy's pupils shiver in unease.

To resist the enemy tank we decided to form a militia.

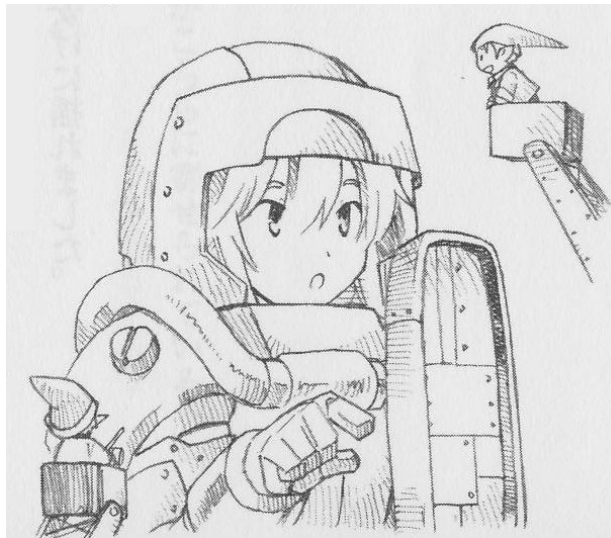
I ordered the fairies to develop weapons.

"You are really into this, master human!"

Even the fairies happily helped.

These were the best weapon of war that could be constructed at the current technological stage.

And they were made from iron.



"How about all this?"

"It will do just fine. Although the shield appears to be a little heavy."

"We'll make some changes'sah!"

The crane lifted away the crudely forged, large shield.

Though made of things readily available, the armor and the helmet had of course been made bespoke.

Around me, as I stood in the workshop, the fairies and the robots they themselves had assembled were going back and forth.

One ought not belittle even things like an armor and a helmet. This was a proper *armor*, one that incorporated excavated engineering / tech skills. It will at least be able to make a iron ball bounce away... or so I wished, went my thoughts.

"What about weapons?"

I could not win a battle with just defensive tools. I needed weapons. The fairies would of course balk at this order. Partway through, they came to have this conversation.

"What about a spherical weapon?" "One that feels cute!" "For women!" "Ve-pan!"

According to the texts, it appeared that in the past world girl-style weapons had become required. There were media reportages, so it was done taking into account the impact it would have on public opinion. It did appear to be a somewhat coherent way of thinking, however, just waving a sword brandished about was definitely scary, so as long as it could be used to make people in the way flee, I had no objections.

The weapon they made was a morning star, a pole that had a spiked sphere attached to its tip.

It had been built with consideration to safety, so not only was the metallic spherical part built small to begin with, the spherical part had a thick silicon cover on it.

"Color variation is at your leisure!" "Flared Red!" "Misty Pink!" "Cobalt Blue!" "Ice White!"

"Cosmic Black!" "Please choose what you like!"

"Then, pink."

Given the shield was pink, I matched it.

Looking at myself in a full-body mirror I found that I had quite the heroic figure.

As expectable, or rather, of course, I had no idea of what a mere shield and morning star could do against a cannon. I examined the protective capabilities of the shield and found that it was loaded with a variety of gimmicks.

If I made use of their functionalities, then I could even manage to manifest an unbelievable 1800 horsepower.

That being said, it was only usable for a brief period of time, because after using that the power supply would be exhausted and I would become utterly unable to move.

I also had no exact understanding of what '1800 horsepower' meant, it must be said.

According to calculations, they said, that was enough power to allow a sumo match with a tank. That was indeed heartening.

However, using it that way would exhaust the batteries in less than one minute.

It was going to be my ace in the hole.

"I should be confident of the strength of my armor, should I?"

"According to calculations you'll be OK."

The fairy answered brimming with confidence.

Even the damage from a tank's main cannon should not be that threatening. Should even the accursed thing attempt to squash me, I would only need to recover via my trump card. The wire-pullers behind the Cultural Preservation Project are going to be either intimidated or put to sleep with this safety bludgeon.

"Still, there is one thing."

"What is it, master human?"

Slowly gazing at the ruins being restored I deeply thought this.

"You have done quite well in making an armor this amazing with the current technological level, indeed."

"It was easy, you know?" "Right?"

Was it indeed like that?

It may have been that, among the things excavated and recovered, there were machines with extremely complex functionalities.

That was because the bequests of human science were also utterly different in type depending on when they were buried, of course. Well, in an age where archaeologists have discovered space suits and waistcoats coexisting in the same time period, that was not so surprising, however.

"Very well then, let us depart for battle!"

"Yeaaaah!"

With an army of fairies behind me, each holding their teensy weapons, I gallantly marched to war.

The hour was midnight. It was a march into the darkness.

Our goal was Kusunoki Village. And our goal was to take back the Monument. Today proud and gallant, tomorrow inside a tomb... that was not unlikely to happen.

Under the protection of our mistress the Moon, which left us with very very long shadows on the flat ground, we formed teams as we advanced. We found nothing whatsoever that we could fear. The march that the fairy military band was playing at a high volume, though it felt like it was coming from a cheap speaker, was perhaps replicating the style of older music, because it had some cacophonous noises mixed in.

As the Village drew closer, I hesitated a little as to whether stop the music.

...we would be spotted anyway.

Our targets were strongly on guard. If so, then there was no point sneaking in quietly.

We were promptly spotted as we defiantly charged into the Village.

"S-, she's here, she's heeere!" "She's pink! She's turned pink!" "That's so tasteless!"

...how rude.

Misters Black Suits, who were wearing said black suit despite it being midnight, hastily left the abandoned house.

Their number was twenty, thirty... and the near totality had pistols in hand. Although fully armed, it was not deniable that they were tense.

"You all stop here, fairies! Everybody run away in different directions, please!"

I was going to win, and also to ensure that their cooperation and goodwill would not go to waste. Then I was going to prosecute the true person behind this disturbance of the peace, revive our trampled-down Village, lead everything to the happiest of climaxes, and turn this problem, too, into a magnificent victory, all by myself!

The men in black suits came to shoot at me. Quite the punishment to give to a maiden still in her prime. I will super never forgive them.

"Oi, what do you do when bullets get jammed?!" "How the hell do you change magazines?"

"Where was the safety, again?!" "Bwaaah, this was a lighteeer?!"

As before, they were complete and total beginners, no changes.

"My turn!"

With my safety bludgeon in hand I charged wildly within the group.

Before unarmed people I could not use the armor's powered-up functionalities, but by

increasing the horsepower just slightly I could swing around the bludgeon. Even if they did not connect, my full-strength swing attack kicked around the black suited men, some of whom became terrified, screamed out, and ran away. There were sporadic counterattacks, but even when the bullets of their pistols hit, they to a one bounced off of my armor.

So this is how many people the UN could field, huh. Despite how I personally did not want to attack, my black suited opponents kept showing up one after another like in a beat'em up game.

With things like this, I had no choice but to rout every single last one of them.

"You accursed black riceees!"

I screamed out a threat which, depending on who heard it, may have been taken as discriminatory, and while purposefully smashing an already wrecked building, I advanced towards the center of the Village.

"Useless! Handguns don't work, they jus'don't!" "Retreeeat!" "Where's the taaank!"

Ngh, tank?

So, as thought, that war machine was still operational.

Fine by me. As an opponent there was nothing wanting about it. And for my part, there was nothing left to chance.

Tremors formed, thuds and clanks, and I began my dance in the middle of the central square. The black suits had already retreated, and I could only see a few still moving far in the distance.

I unintentionally went to step towards them, but I paused my walking.

"Ohddeardear, it would be bad to be lured in by that open span of ground."

Although riddled with remnants, the Village still had plenty of cover. I hid myself behind a building, watching what opponent was going to emerge. After all, should the cannon have been repaired, it would be quite dangerous.

Heh heh heh, was how I showed the composure within my upswing of mood.

The wise were not to fret but to wait for a chance of victory.

And that was when something like a massive, round, and polished boulder smashed the house behind which I was hiding, stabbing into the ground close enough to graze the tip of my nose.

"....."

I was so shocked that it was just like time had stopped, I was unable to respond.

I fell on my posterior, dodging away, with quite the delay.

It was a massive boulder. A ferocious thing about an armful in size, it had to have had a weight of about thirty kilograms, was I correct? If this thing had struck me right on the head it would have been turned into a cherry tomato, helmet and all, would it not?

"Are you demons or what!"

No matter however much humanity had declined, no matter however much it had aged, this was far too brutal. To make a comparison, it had the nastiness with which Grandfather, were he to be seriously angered, would draw a gun recovered from the distant periods of war.

This was an enemy that was going to hunt evil and do righteous deeds, and with that American Machismo that said no reason was needed to do that.

There were houses and ruins in the direction from which the boulder had come, and my gaze could not see through. That said, emerging in an open area to see more easily would have been dangerous.

A faint oscillation reached me from the ground. The tank was approaching.

As I fell back I spotted an opening between the houses and managed to see what was on the

other side.

Over there, separated from me by several roads, was a tank, showing off its front as it headed my way. The distance was of about one hundred meters. The turret had been removed together with the main cannon, which had broken earlier, and in their stead they had fixed in some device that looked like a complex assembly of square lumber. At the center of the device I could see what looked like a massive spoon, or rather, a spatula. In the concave part of the spoon there was another of those flinging stones that had been aimed at me until a moment before.

"A c-, catapult...?"

A medieval catapult in the stead of a broken main cannon?

For some reason the concept seemed quite Grandfather-like... regardless, not by any account would he fire a cannon or catapult a stone towards his own flesh and blood, therefore this had to be someone else.

I had it that that Einstein person had guessed that nuclear bombs would be used in World War II. He had no idea what sort of weapons would be used in World War III, but when it came to World War IV, it would have been fought with sticks and stones.

And look at what was happening now!

I gripped the Safety Bludgeon tight.

"All right!"

My enemy had a catapult. Once they fire one shot, it will take time for them to fire the next. And their aim was not accurate, of course. If I approached in a single rush and flipped them on their back, I would have won.

We go.

The prediction of victory disarrayed my nasal breathing.

Although at this point the tank was showing me its flank, we were at the proper positions to close in on each other. I forcefully twisted myself in a gap between houses. Using the powers of the armor, I charged at 1800 horsepower, turning the ghost town into shreds. The tank instantly detected my location, turned around with good force, and pointed the catapult cannon(?) my way.

A device I was unfamiliar with was installed on the wooden frame part of the catapult. I could not foresee what function it was going to have, it was a tiny machine with a black cover. The bared wiring went inside the tank's frame, so I predicted that the device was measuring data of some kind and elaborating it in dodgy ways inside of itself. Whatever that machine was thinking, it was incomprehensible.

I was going to go for that machine!

I surveyed the land, calculated my motions versus those of my opponent's, predicted, and came out with the most suitable timing. When I tried to consult my memories, I came up with what that calculation device that the tank used to accurately fire was. It was a firing controller device.

It meant that that tank's stone-throwing attacks required an electrically operated device.

It was silly.

A stone was fired. The aim was quite accurate, it aimed for my face and flew nearly horizontally. What could have been called a waste of technology.

Taking that first hit made the shield all too easily cave in, and the deformation went all the way down to the base and cracked the hardpoints. It may also have been because I had accelerated, but it had quite the impressive might. But this was no longer some mess that would cause me to lose heart, I instead charged towards the tank without being so foolish as

to stop my motions.

I could see the simple, wooden loading mechanism load the next projectile in the fixed launch position.

Gaaah, I went.

Oh nooo, I went.

They had paid altogether too much attention to something as trivial as throwing rocks.

I did not believe Einstein had said what he had said with this in mind.

Regardless, according to my instinctive calculations, it was likely that my approach was going to happen slightly sooner than that catapulting. No, it was certain that it would. Although not a specialist like the black box, I too excelled at calculations.

As long as I did not happen to trip on the way, I was never going to become like a cherry tomato. I screwed myself through the gaps between house and house, making my armor run. I was going to win. I then discovered the face of Assistant-san at my feet.

Emergency stop—

"WHAT ARE YOU DOOOIIING?!"

Assistant-san had a baby sheep in his arms. And he was in the worst place at the worst time. Those clear eyes he was looking up at me blinked wide as if they knew no fear.

A sharp sound, indicating that the second shot had been fired. It was in the instant where all choices regarding my motions had vanished.

I bent over to protect Assistant-san.

Immediately afterwards, a massive stone smacked straight into my head.

Dead at dawn turned into a cherry tomato.

Perhaps because of the external stimuli, perhaps because it was a classic if drastic remedy, at the utmost limits of my death I rapidly recovered my memories.

Ahhh, this was that Revolving Lantern I heard so many rumors about...

It had started just like the last movie of one's life.

How Did Things Get to This Point? (A UN Distributions Film)

"It finished?"

As I was devoted to paperwork, my worst friend Y, who had apparently been busy for so long that she might have been working all night since yesterday or sometime, asked me that with dead eyes.

"What do you mean?"

"The program?"

"Huh?"

Given the tendency of the education imparted on us, it was a fact that neither I nor Y were specialists in any field, meaning the work orders we were given tended to be low-level or vague, covering all sorts of areas.

Programming had low- and high-level languages.

I did not mean to say that high-level was amazing and low-level was inadequate, those were descriptions given from a human standpoint. In short, high-level languages were easier to understand for humans while low-level languages were easier to understand for machines, that was what it meant.

Machine language was said to be the representative of all low-level languages.

What was managed within a computer was a list of data transformed into two-digit figures, which was called binary code, so intervening directly on it was hard to understand and a great

annoyance for humans. And there they used higher level languages, which could be described as more abstract, and once those were translated in machine language, they could be executed.

Because describing functions in this abstracted language made it possible to implement necessary functionality, work efficiency tended to improve.

"Once I go down that corridor and turn at that corner I'll find that yakisoba bread is sold out so maybe I'll get croquette bread or a ham sandwich plus the thing as a drink so how many minutes and how many hours until I get back also I've got an open tab..." could, without specifying every parameter, be done with a "hey you, go purchase the usual!", and the one that would have to type that would have it much more easy than not.

And so, the current trend was of super-ultra-high-level languages as derived from high-level languages.

These did not require any specialized knowledge whatsoever.

By relying on the understanding of a computer, natural language would express functions.

Using natural language, as far as convenience, only meant requiring speaking normally.

Human words might seem like a good and simple idea, but there were unexpectable complexities to them as well. It was possible to have implied suggestions, to communicate via ambiguous expressions, and to carry plenty of meaning in brief sentences. Only an ultra-high-level language could put all those complexities identical as-spoken into multilayered code.

Multilayered code was so complicated and difficult to explain that it was nearly physically impossible to write down in a flowchart on a piece of paper, that was the best way to express how high the work efficiency was with this.

Most importantly, since it was a fragmentary version of what humans did normally in their brains meant, at the same time, that it could not be denied that the calculations that were the sole thing that filled in the blanks were dodgy.

"So, right now I'm compiling the source code I wrote in Utellme, it kinda works, are we finished with this? We can say we are, right?"

"Please do not ask me."

Utellme was the super-ultra-high-level language that Y liked and used, its permitted range of abstractions was extremely wide, and, also, on the opposite side, no matter how much code was written it was hard to create bugs, which meant that even contradictory things that would be spat out as an error were self-interpreted, even if in perfunctory manners, making it a terrifying language where one could create mistakes much further down.

As it was something initially developed in jest, I had it that it was a game-like language based on how it was possible to forcibly make even vaguely defined functions work, but much later it was seen that the translated program's functionalities improved, and with quite the minimal upkeep, hindrances vanished altogether, and on top of that learning it was easy and productivity was extremely high, meaning that even beginner-tier programmers were quickly ready for battle, and that was why she was using it.

It was quite convenient and thus extensively used, but on the occasion I found it filled with incredibly dangerous landmines, so I did not really use it. On that, the pseudo-language I preferred was called Bubble, where accessing something similar to the actual program was possible through the simple act of reading the source code, leading to the possibility of large-scale inspections and 'sampling' on massive levels, something that could maybe be said to be representative of this age without copyright... whoopsie, we would do better to leave discussing the job of programming at that. There would be no end to it otherwise.

"Well, is it not all right? After all, it will not be a particularly important module, right?"

"Who knows? Haven't heard anything but that it's gonna be used in the People Monument Project."

"What kind of program is it?"

"Well, it's a module that automatically turns newly acquired information into data and tags it appropriately."

When I asked for a bit more detail in the explanation, she told me that, when information was turned into data, it was compared to existing data and thus the program could automatically conclude that they were the same type and apply a seal of approval.

Suppose that a specific Data A, recovered from somewhere, is an electronic book on history. And that another Data B recovered elsewhere is also an electronic book on history. With no need to manually tag each and every one of them as history books, the program was able to automatically categorize both of them as history books. By applying a 'same type' tag, even if the volume of information increased later, there will be nothing hindering retrieval. To put it frankly, this would make it easy to squeeze data into a specific classification.

"...quite important, that, is it not? Would that not be a module called every time something is scanned in?"

"Will it, now. Ain't heard anything about how it's gonna be used. Do you really believe that a work that important'd be dumped on a newbie like me in the first place?"

"Depending on your supervisor, yes."

"My superior said that, this job here, he had no idea where it came from, you know."

"Woooah!"

That there felt like a violent outburst of that idleness and laziness of Former Humanity.

...so jobs that worthless did also exist.

"Please lend it to me a little. Let us try cross-checking it in another environment."

I booted up one of the supplied computers, one identical to the one Y was using, and transferred the program together with its execution environment.

I launched said program with the debugger.

Using the debugger I set it to run for a fixed number of times, as well as set its environmental parameters, and began its ten-thousand-times loop.

"Ten thousand times, how many hours's that gonna take!"

Y smiled, always ready to pick a fight, as she peeked into the screen.

Furious, I replied this.

"Around three hours. You know how it is. Programmers of old left the machines on and running all day long while eating pizza with chopsticks, see? Besides, they are very much not living flesh and blood, they are just arithmetic units, and that is why I am doing this, of course. Y remained ready to pick a fight.

As well as being a giant construction enterprise built to commemorate the existence of humanity, The People's Monument was also a large-capacity recording device.

Besides supporting the various forms of information transmission developed throughout history and all that was inputted in it accurately supervised, it caught data streams and would have hacked them or analyzed the target material next to them, it was an information system that actively pulled information together.

Initially, it was left behind to be the perpetual assistance of the fairies.

But the fairies were far too exceptional on their own, and the need to support them was gone.

Despite that, and also because it was managed by the government, the project did not stop and, recently, gained the even deeper dye of becoming a purely informational monument.

And the program Y had done was going to be used in the Monument. That was how it was

going to be.

It was a grand enterprise.

I thought it better if they had well and truly put a stop to it.

"That's rude. Then, what! Are you telling me that I should study a more reliable language right now?"

"When is delivery due?"

"Day before yesterday."

I see, indeed.

Everything related to the Monument had suddenly become quite active of late.

"And because of that, every time I meet those guys in black I get complaints, I jus' wanna give up!"

These days, merely walking around the Village's main street a little bit meant passing by men and women in black clothes.

They were supervision managers dispatched by the UN to ensure progress was being made, and the majority of their job consisted of going around and kicking those related to the project in the posterior.

Kusunoki Village, as you should all be well aware, had as its main peculiarity how it was a lake paradise where the air of the fairy tale remained thick, and where, that aside, the people there lived an idle, fairy-tale like life.

This project, which had spanned quite a few years, had in fact a good number of UN technicians related to it, all freshly appointed to this land, who sunk down to their necks in enjoying the slow life, as if their clocks had no seconds or minute hands.

And that was when a large number of people formally kicking their posteriors were pushed towards them, meaning it was natural that all manners of frictions appeared between the people on the site.

With all these people on the job I stopped seeing fairies around, even those cowering in fear, and, perhaps also due to the influence of that, the Village itself gained the mood of a truly terrifying and grim fairy tale.

That was the reason why even Y, who would normally be found wandering about here and there, was instead crammed in an office and sunk into work to her head.

But people in black clothes could be seen anywhere.

"My apologies for the intrusion. Sensei, may I inquire as to the progress of your project?"

A Black Clothes (♀) appeared in the Office. Being one with their clothes they did not take off their sunglasses even indoors, and even her hair was a well-cared brunette, fitting in the black color pattern.

"Ahhh, you came at the right moment. I was just finishing it."

"...sensei."

This lady in black clothes called her 'sensei'.

There were two types of reactions in people being called 'sensei', that of irritation and that of elation, and Y appeared to be the latter. No, well, it was fine, truly.

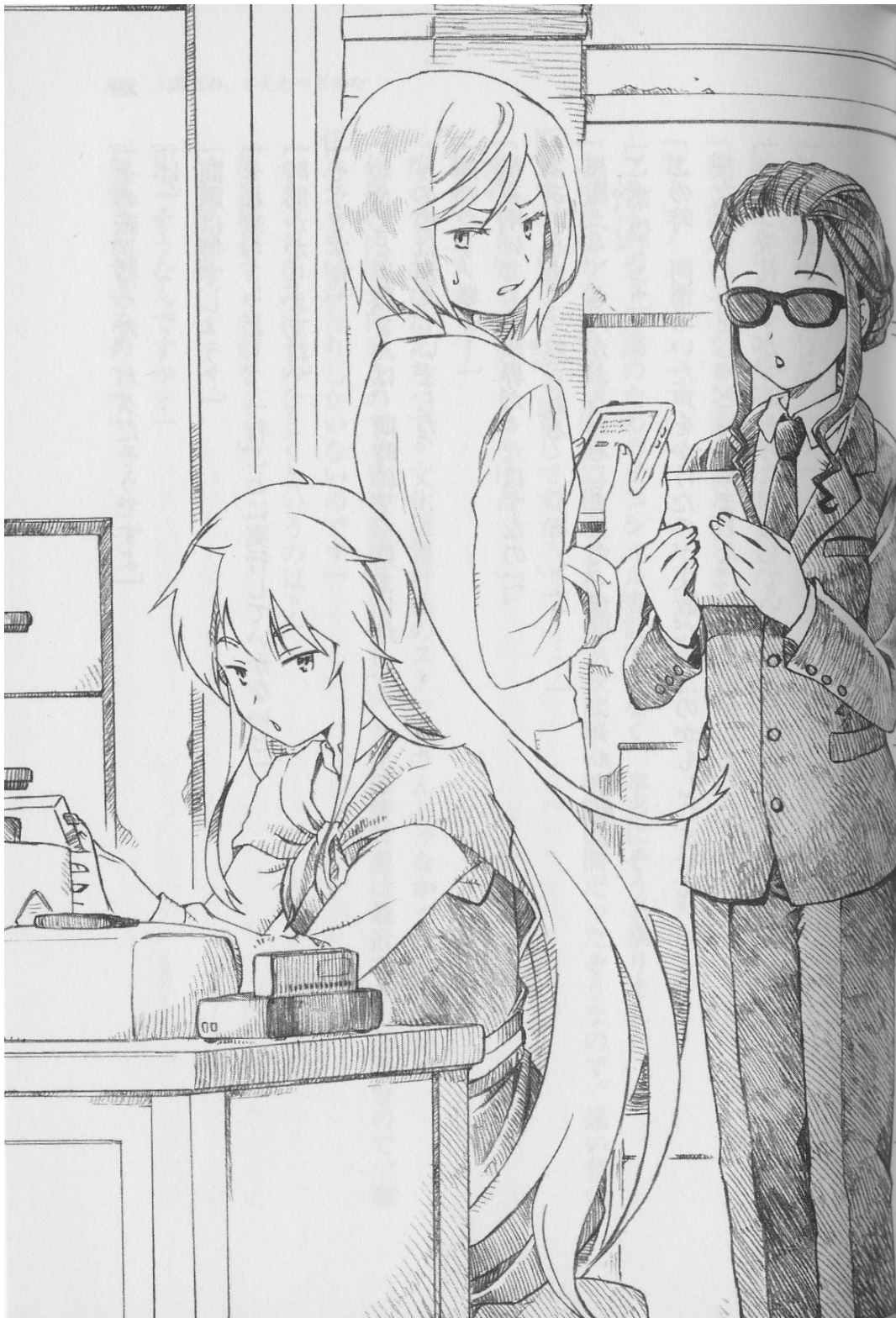
"I see, that is a relief."

Even with her eyes covered, I could tell that this Black Clothes (♀) was reassured.

Despite how normally Y was sooo very annoying.

"I'll hand you over the data right away."

"If you would be so kind."



Y took out her computer with excitement. Black Clothes (♀) took out something identical from her breast pocket, and the instant the two transfer ports were connected, my computer gave a brief beep, announcing that a problem had arisen.

"Hold the transfer. This looks like a bug."

"Ngh..."

"What seems to be the problem?"

"Well, I am not sure... I am running it line by line."

"That would take some time, I expect."

"So it seems."

Both I and the lady in black clothes looked at Y at the same time.

Y had disappeared.

"She ran away! So quickly!"

And that despite how I thought that she was going to be at her limits, given she had just pulled an all-nighter.

"Awww, again... they'll get mad at me... what do I do..."

Black Clothes (♀) had lost her composure. She was unexpectedly brittle, mentally speaking.

"My condolences."

Speaking to someone with a sympathizing tone at times like these may have been a mistake.

She stared straight at me. I had a bad feeling about this.

"Uhm, I know I'm being rude, but who would be the daughter of the office chief that works here..."

"That would be I."

"I am very sorry about all this!"

Black Clothes (♀) straightened herself.

"I am an UN Agent, my name is K."

"K?"

I was not stating only her name's an initial to protect her privacy, she truly told me that she was called like that.

"Ah, it's an old habit. Before we were in the UN, we were acting as some sort of army intelligence operation. That was long in the past, however. Do you know about MI6?"

"Well, I am sure my Grandfather would know..."

These were odd people.

"Wait. Are you saying that you people are not part of the Cultural Preservation Project's staff?"

"With the job entailing what it did, we were subcontracted. The Cultural Preservation Project was a position only recently established, so we could only have one permanent staff member."

"Huuuh. By the way, who is that one permanent staff?"

"He's the bureau's boss, his name is—"

It was the VIP Boss.

"What, it was him?"

"He's employed full time."

"For that, the Boss almost never pressures us to do our job..."

"The Boss requires specialists for his job of promoting an impression of everyone being co-workers, which is extremely difficult to manage, and because of that, the job fell on us, who are former specialists in information manufacturing..."

Ayup, I got it.

Looks like that Boss pushed jobs that would have made him look bad onto others, indeed.

Greedy, he liked his being employed full time in an important position, but he wanted to avoid getting shunned by his underlings. And that was why he made human sacrifice of these people...

That was just like what that "revered" person would think.

"I see. Being former spies, then, you would know how to fight the world in an war of information, and, like the most notorious of editors, you can manipulate even the fussiest of artists, is that it?"

"It isn't. Honestly, at present, we are less involved in information manufacturing than we are in woodcraft, we are skilled in making daily necessities and repairing things, all jobs of this kind..."

"That is quite the change."

It was far too peaceful of them... but what else from a humanity in decline.

"Woodcraft, you mean working trees and making furniture, that?"

"Yes! We excel at that and at papercraft."

K-san made a friendly smile.

"Though both crafts, they are highly dissimilar, are they?"

"Well, no matter how much we'd like it, acting the spies simply isn't possible anymore."

This was a nice girl with no dark sides to her. I came to like her just a teensy bit.

"It is a disaster, then. Your job, I mean."

"Not at all! Your Grandfather-sama also really wanted this, he said."

"...my Grandfather did?"

"Yes. He is replicating an ancient boulder-throwing device (a catapult), and he is very thankful for the assistance. It was so much fun!"

So, I merely fail to see him for a while and off he goes playing those games again, huh...

"The more I ask, the more suited you people feel for this job."

On my saying that, she became dispirited.

"...see, normally I never wear anything but frilly skirts. I just can't feel relaxed in trousers. I'm only wearing this because the Boss said we all had to wear the same funeral clothes. It erases humanity and permits controlling the impression people have, or so I have it, but..."

"Awww..."

Black clothes and sunglasses... they gave a tremendously bad impression, that much was certain.

The VIP Boss did it, she said... he was not in Decline enough.

Despite the generation being what it was, he was dragging the humanity of old behind himself with all his strength.

"It was an order, so there was nothing we could do. Ah!, I derailed the conversation, sorry."

"It is nothing."

"Sensei!"

"Y-, yes?"

This 'sensei' was nothing like the pure and innocent call of a child to the 'sensei' who was teaching them what to study, it was a 'sensei' that somehow had a certain tinge of trying to flatter someone above them. That, more or less, was the specific nuance that worked between *adults*.

"Could you please assist me with something, sensei?"

"Who, me? I am just a novice..."

"Come now. There's jobs beginners like us just aren't able to do. That is, unless we can borrow your strength, sensei."

"...what kind of job?"

I happened to have grown elated and that had been a mistake.

"Could you please help us with the development?"

The People's Monument itself was set up as a commemorative Monument, had to maintain itself for over several thousand years while also remaining operational, and recently it seems that the form of a monolith had been chosen as its housing.

"The exterior is nearly complete, I see."

In the periphery of the Village there towered something of jet-black wall, tall enough that one had to look up at it. It was placed on a bizarre foundation that looked like a spiderweb made of machines.

"What is this foundation for?"

"Both a many-legged network unit for self-propulsion as well as an ultrabase."

Agent K answered that.

"Self-propulsion... so this thing walks?"

"That was seen, in the long-term view, as necessary for survivability. If left outside, on the long-term, it would be exposed to the elements, and another thing needed was for it to avoid disasters. These may sound extreme, but it had to be designed so that if a volcano erupted, the earth flooded, or anything happened that made the environment significantly worsen, it could move into a safe area on its own."

"I see..."

It was so thorough and exaggerated that it became both rational and irrational. It felt like their minds, faced with a public project this massive in size, had twisted into odd directions.

"But the pyramids didn't move at all, and survived so long despite that..."

"Pyramids were really enormous. I wouldn't compare the two."

Agent K said this as she looked up at the massive black casing.

"Ah, right. Could you give a nickname to this?"

"Isn't People's Monument enough?"

"The official name is still undecided, but, in order to have it help us, we are giving you naming rights for the software inside."

They could not possibly have believed that that was enough of a payment.

A name, right, a name...

"Then, I."

"Not I as in 'ai'?"

"The alphabetical I (ee). Same as you, K-san."

"...isn't it playing it a little too safe?"

"I believe these things ought to be simple. Having also the implication of 'AI' or of the self (I) would do well at this point, I believe."

"Hmmm, do you, truly?"

Agent K smoothly added the christening on her notebook.

"May I see it start?"

"Ah, sure. It can be started up. The system works without interruptions, so it can be put into standby without cutting off power completely. At full, the battery should last three thousand years."

"So this is the technology of the last stages of humanity..."

"Of course. It's amazing. Putting it together alone required the fully-automated factory nearby."

Fully-automated factory, she cannot possibly mean...

"By doing nothing more than making it conduct electricity, the ancient metal can change between liquid and solid, you see. Solid could be carried, liquid could be poured into molds and hardened again, and the casing was finished in a flash, just like that."

"I know about that material. In the past, even buildings were made of that."

"Were they?"

"By mixing in earth it becomes viscous and can move by itself. If used skillfully, there is no need for a mold, even."

Agent K made a face like she could not believe this.

"And despite being so amazing, I have a feeling that only little remained as bequests from ancient times, see. I also feel that they should have covered the entirety of the soil with it, however."

"Would that not have been expensive, even in the past?"

"Ahhh, you're right."

"That, normally, would be assailed by the weather and turned into for example sand. It may be unexpected, but old for old, the stone-built bequests may just hold on together for longer."

"Mh-hmmm. But seriously, you truly are the granddaughter of that famous sensei. In erudition, I mean."

"Erudition or not aside, I have seen that with my own eyes, once..."

I gave her a summary of what I had seen of this material in my adventures so far.

"I-, is that all true?"

Agent K made a face like she could not believe this even more.

...that was not unexpectable.

"Speaking personally, I am more surprised that the UN has preserved these things, however. If they had large amounts of this omnipotent construction material, they could even design and create one whole city with no issues."

An observation diary of growing old: that sounded like an interesting self-research for Summer break.

"That would be impossible, of course. The amount stockpiled went to this monolith... I, and I have it that they used all they had."

"Aw, still, relying on Lost Technology so much feels a bit scary."

Like magic, the sciences of the Last of Humanity had unknowable side effects, and, for us at present, the realm of the things we did not know was entirely too vast.

And so it was that the technology of the Twilight was almost entirely lost, however, occasionally, what remained behind became the smoldering embers of a great upheaval.

When touched with a hand, the shell gave me a feeling of metal, but also of something soft.

"It's soft to the touch, right? It produces this faint repulsive force that ensures that no dust or dirt will set upon it."

"Thinking that, it is credible that it would also move on its own."

Agent K seemed to be a nice person, which made me want to help her, but I was not so naive that I could not help foreseeing trouble when I was to interact with something this extremely technological.

Rather, if it looked even only a little bit dangerous... I would run!

It was an iron decision that came from the rules I had formed out of my experiences.

"So, what would be my job? I am not good at programming, you know?"

I fearfully fearfully asked that.

"If anything comes down to programming, we have developed a specialized language. It's

called Communi, and it's a conversation-type language so using it is simple. Don't worry."

"Simple, you say, but... wait, what are you going to have me do?"

"What we'd like you to do is to educate the artificial intelligence that the Monument is going to use."

"...that does sound like a pretty important job, I must say."

"Well, that may be."

"Besides, educating a computer by conversing with him... that would create vagueness over vagueness, and I have no idea how it will be raised if done that way, are you aware of this?"

"At this point in time we have backups, if you fail then you'll just have made one of many failures."

"That fuzzy way of doing this could end up in quite the big mess, could it not? I do however believe that a careful design made by examining what is wanted and what is unneeded would be better, however..."

"In the beginning we requested the help of a specialist to find out whether that was possible, but... these days, his forgetfulness has become a little bit severe."

"How old was that specialist?"

"Eighty-nine."

No way that was going to work.

What once were top-rank specialists were gradually beginning to age, making the impatience of the UN understandable.

They would ask even newbies like Y, I expected.

Sure, but whatever angle you look at this from, this was a death march...

"I will be speaking frankly now."

"Go ahead."

"Humanity at present has no person that could fully plan out the development of a system. Of course, that would be impossible even for me."

"...that's some problem to have."

"How about giving up being easy to browse and simply sticking to cramming it with data? I mean, if a future world ever came, we should leave the hard work to the people who want that data."

"Despite how this is going to be the last work of humanity, is that what you mean?"

K's voice shivered as she put her hands together like in a prayer. Pure and innocent eyes moistened on the other side of her sunglasses.

"No, but after all, you as well..."

"I heard that you have dealings with fairies, sensei. That's amazing. That's not a really easy thing to do. Styles come to the surface when using conversational languages, so it's possible that those experiences will be of use in their uniqueness. Could you at least give it one single try? Could you do it?"

If I ran away at this point, I would not get involved in anything troublesome.

If I undertook this, there will first come a disaster, and no mistake.

"Please, could you do it?"

"Ngh..."

An invisible wave or something splashed from her to me.

I was vulnerable to having people approach me in person.

"...I can only do what I can, all right."

"Thank you very much! You will be of great help!"

I tried touching the input/output terminal installed at the base of the Monument.

A simplistic menu screen appeared.

While thinking about where an artificial intelligence would be needed in all this, when I selected 'data search' from the menu I was displayed a group of raw files with no categorization, sorting, or even any understandable naming convention, I found a chaos of images and sounds and videos and graphs and texts that numbered 170 quadrillion (give or take a trillion).

"HyEeeh!"

And no one thought what to do about this, I see.

"All the information recovered up to this point has been stored. Even this is still very very far from being possible to call a history of humanity, and that's despite how it's already far too massive and impossible to manage."

"How did it become like this?"

"As I said, we left it all to an eighty-nine years old..."

To improve the examinability, categorizability, and browsability of 170 quadrillion pieces of data...

This required a work like compiling a massive dictionary.

And I had nooo know-how whatsoever on the subject, of course.

On that, what was displayed on a single screen were pure thumbnail-less filenames at the smallest possible font size and numbered several hundred. Forget searching for data that stood out, it would take a lifetime to fail to browse to the last page.

"This is... beyond any help, correct?"

"But there's a way," went K's agent-like, undaunted words. "We can leave selection to I itself."

"...is this AI that smart?"

"It was set to have about the mental age of a two years old."

Speechless.

"Let us make that at least fifteen years."

"This was salvaged from a non-volatile memory of unknown provenance, it was software for use as hobby, but once investigation was attempted, it was found to have tremendous versatility and it was therefore concluded that it had vast functionalities, so it came to be installed in our present project."

Using a toy in a real application, truly...

It was something that happened often.

Videogame consoles reused as control systems for weapons, flying straight to the moon even if in 16 bit, I heard that there was many such thing, in the past.

"In the attached README file there was written that it would get into a rebellious age, and thus to please never set it older than ten years old."

"What does it mean by 'rebellious age'?"

"That it would start fighting against humans."

"So it would fight to be independent from that foolish humanity, huh."

Was that true...? What if it was a joke?

"As a test we tried installing it in an automated cleaning machine robot, and it went past its set cleaning range and vanished into nothingness."

"How youthful..."

"With that as prior offense, and in consideration of safety, it was restricted to about two years old."

Except that way I expected him to be unable to do anything but exactly what each command said.

"So it all depends on how it is raised."

"Mnh-mnh."

I see, this might be just a little bit fun.

"May I have the development environment? I wish to see it for just a bit. Also, I would like for Assistant-san to help me later on."

"Assistant?"

"Except for dealing with certain specific problematic points, he is far better at programming than me. I am sure he can take care of this. He just seems to be bad at creating the overall setting, however."

The artificial intelligence had been sleeping inside a specialist's development machine.

I decided to have the massive monitor and its machinery carried into the Office and promptly engaged the artificial intelligence, I, to a conversation.

I input nearly-normal words (words most often spoken), had the interpretation program translate them, and thus came to greet 'I'.

"Yes, 'evening."

The interpretation program translated the greeting with a seasoning of meaning, significance, and cultural background, and spat it out on the computer's side.

This was the response displayed after a while.

Hello World

That screen that I thought would be the last thing I would ever experience in my life instead came to the end of the first act with a brief moment of curtain fall.

"What?"

I thought it the Revolving Lantern, but it appeared that I was mistaken.

The sensation of a sudden chilly air being cast out from the vague warmth of my recollections told me that this was the world of reality.

Waking from the dream I found that my consciousness felt clear, but on the reverse, that my thoughts were confused.

It seemed that, for some reason, I found myself facing up. The sensation of earth pushed me behind my back.

The exact previous moment in my memories I had been walking on two legs and felt the ground directly beneath my feet, but now that sensation had suddenly shifted to my back, which left my sensations in a state of confusion.

The clear blue sky opened wide before my eyes.

Where it came from I did not know, but there was a nice scent of barbecued chicken and fried fish. It was lunchtime, I would say.

I could not tell for how long I had been unconscious. I was not hungry.

And before all that, there was the even more inexplicable fact that I was still alive.

I thought I was hit by a catapulted boulder, which had split my head...

Although I had my life spared I had to have had a gruesome injury, but when I tried to touch that badly affected part, I found that my arms would not move at all.

"Huh?"

Not just my arms, my whole body was immobilized.

As if my limbs were paralyzed, I was conscious but my body was not free. I believe those who have experienced it would know, but it was scarily sinister.

I devoted myself to struggling.

I was sort of like a spoiled brat still laid down as I jostled left and right, and then there was a tinkling sound. Those were chains. They were what was restraining me so firmly to the ground.

There were a good number of chains, all affixed to stakes at both ends.

Though the fetters were sturdy they were not perfect, there were sections that had some slack. As I slowly forced them, the stakes pounded into the ground at both ends began coming off little by little.

After pulling off the first stake, the rest was easy.

It did not take ten minutes to take off the restraints, and then I could look around.

...something was wrong.

I was struck by the intense feeling that something was off.

The scene itself had not changed. And still it was strange. Something about it was strange. Clearly strange.

I thought it a subjective change. A sense that something was off that I could not examine. I could do nothing but doubt myself. Doubt the very way I was structured.

There were no people in black clothes around. I could not recognize any other human figures.

Assistant-san – whom I believed had come to save me – was nowhere I could see.

Even a hallucination of him would have been fine.

Come now, I must go inspect the Monument.

With the speed of a riding horse I rushed out of the Village.

A road that normally took thirty minutes I ran through in less than three.

The construction site was outside the Village.

The power supply truck had been wrecked and flipped over. The temporary antenna was broken in half, and the shed that had been used as materials storage was turned into pieces. Parts of crushed machinery laid scattered about. This was where the Monument was set up and adjustments performed on it.

"...it is not here."

What ought have been there was not.

There was no Monument.

The 'I' that I had reared myself was not there.

Who could have taken him and where... no, that was not the point. Remember. I needed to remember. It was not something I recalled theoretically and therefore could assert that it could not be stated. It was something that existed within the realm of my memories, to put it into other words. I could simply not read that back out aloud.

Right, this was where I worked.

Where I was raised in proper education. I found this all quite precious to me.

A fragment of memories all of a sudden ran past my brain.

"Good morning."

Good morning.

"How are you feeling today?"

My performance has been stable since the beginning of the current day.

"Are there any things you wish for me to do?"

There are none.

"Nothing at all? Like, wanting to improve your functionality or something?"

There are none.

"No wants, then, I see... or rather, I must set them up myself. This might be quite the work,

perhaps."

Context error detected. This conversation is nonsensical.

"Whoopsie, no good jumping too far forwards, then... it looks like this is going to take a while."

It was indeed going to take a while.

By repeatedly conversing with people, little by little I gained experienced.

To tell the truth, the intelligence setting was tremendously vague. Nobody seemed able to state where intelligence started nor where it ended. I had raised something I did not understand. The artificial intelligence inside the box was different from a human baby.

I simply and constantly conversed with it, tried having it work, made additions to the dictionary file, made it search the colossal swarm of data... made it so that conversations with it were more or less smooth.

"Good morning."

Good morning.

"How are you feeling today?"

Favorably.

"Are there any things you wish for me to do?"

No, nothing in particular.

"Do you not feel something like a being that wants to aid mankind in its computer-like ways?"

What is even that? LOL

"Which would you be interested in romancing, a vacuum cleaner or a washing machine?"

What is even that? LOL

"Raw wheat, raw rice, raw eggs?"

What is even that? LOL

"It's jus' responds the same way to words he doesn't know or conversations he can't follow, ain't it!"

Y said that, bored.

"That is only because he lacks a sufficient variety of patterns in storage, it will eventually fix itself on its own."

"No, this thing, see, if by recalling enough patterns it'd become able to hold conversations... would that be a soul?"

"Hummm... for now, I do get the feeling we are reaching a mutual understanding."

A machine passing the Turing test was seen as being intelligent. However, while that did show excellent craftsmanship, it was no proof that it had an actual soul.

"When the time comes, will this square of an artificial intelligence be able to respond flexibly to people?"

"If... well, if there are enough patterns, then..."

"Inputting every pattern's impossible. You'd never be done with this thing."

"Welll..."

"...excuse me, but the presence or absence of a soul isn't important, what he needs to be good at are long-term self-preservation and ease of end-user support, if I may specify."

Agent K said that nervously.

As before, educational training came in parallel with the expansion of functionalities.

"Is there anything you want?"

I want data.

"And do you understand why you want it?"

I don't. This desire has been set from the start to be given maximum importance.

"The program that governs your instinct has been masked away and you cannot self-analyze it. Just like a human."

That is new data.

"You seem happy about it."

What is even that? LOL

"...you ought prepare more patterns to use when you do not understand something. There might be plenty of people who would be made angry by that one line."

The sensors to be installed in the Monument's case had been hauled in.

With this, the development of the outer shell was complete.

Although they were for understanding the exterior's environment, they also served as sensor organs.

In the words of humans they would be like sight or olfaction.

However, this was a machine, and therefore able to perceive external information better than humans. Air temperature, humidity, wind speed, infrared and ultraviolet: it was being installed with external input devices far beyond a human's, and that was where I put a stop to it.

"We must install restrictions."

Each sensors constantly gathered environmental data with nothing from the central will that could stop them.

They operated 24/7 without rest. For a human being, cutting off input required many layers of problems plus physical time, all of which had to be included in the programming. Despite this, once a part of the job had been done, performance was reduced. To recover it, a series of problematic procedures ended in 'I' requiring sleep.

It required periods of sleep after acquiring a fixed amount of information, only then would the appetite for information reach its maximum value or, in other words, the status of I's stomach become empty. Of course, unlike humans there would be no death by starvation.

Other adjustments went as I felt like them.

"Why did you set it like this?"

"...no real reason."

Agent K had looked puzzled until the very end.

I myself did not understand. Still, the more inconvenient, and the stronger the desire, the better. That was how I thought it should be done.

Leaving it all to brute force by relying on computational strength would never lead to trouble, right?

Left without the full ability for self control, and battered by a storm of information on top of that, it should be able to construct its own sense of values... well, it could happen, I mean.

It was a life form different from humans, one that put the value of information at its core.

So how will it go in the end?

Will he become a new friend of humanity, which has always lived alone?

It was with these lofty expectations that I activated this new version. And it happened immediately afterwards.

The Monument ran rampant.

I had remembered.

And the instant I remembered now ran past me.

Having run rampant, the Monument ignored any and all external restrictions. It swung about its dinosaur-sized legs and wrecked anything that was around it. The Monument showed a massive rejection against artificiality and began moving towards the Village.

Exactly. What had destroyed the Village was nothing else but the Monument itself. I was sure they tried to stop it. They had to find a way to.

Were it me, I would certainly think about doing that. That thing was still continuing its rampage even now, I believed. And I was chasing after it, no mistake.

Running and running without stopping at all.

Where did the monument go, that, I did not know. But it would be possible to find it. I had a feeling that said so.

I cut across the road with long strides, leaping across a fence. Stomp, the ground shook. I could see crawly and tiny things zipping around at my feet.

Fairies...?

And in large numbers. It was a mad rush, all trying to escape. I needed to be careful not to step on one.

One of them pointed at me and fired a seed cannon, which had no effect.

Ahhh... what is this—

In opposition to the fairies that were trying to escape me, there was one single fairy that confronted me. The odd thing was that he was wearing a skirt. It was this one who was waving his arms over his head.

Catapult.

"?!"

Terror utterly froze me. ...it looked like this had become a trauma for me.

The pebble, which struck my forehead with a light sound then tumbled off made me oddly calm.

The fairy who had tossed the pebble at me said this with an angry face.



"What are you doing!"

"What... I was searching for a runaway monolith..."

"You big dunderhead!"

"Why did you call me that for?!"

"Because you are, well, that very monolith!"
...wait, what?

I suppose that at this point you have guessed the truth.

Filtered by the masking, truly seeing myself became no longer possible. After all, that was where the observational records were stored.

Rationally, I could understand that. It also fit with several other points of doubt.

But emotionally, I could not accept that. Rather, I did not want to believe it.

That I would not be a human being, truly...

There was nothing more for me to do than rampage. Since, according to my definition file, humans who did not understand their situation could only be insane.

I swung about my multiple legs and smashed them into on side of whatever I looked at.

"ENOUGH ALREADYYY!"

An invisible power was forced upon me.

An unknown, transparent phenomenon that I could not calculate instantly pushed me on the ground. It was a force like magic. It was a force that could not be understood by a brain that knew only 0s and 1s, binary code. A force that existed in the gaps between existence and nonexistent, that was what it was.

"Thank you for all your work, fairies. Please continue restraining it as you are."

A presence I could not recall nor was in any file moved across my back.

...what was that just then?

I was being restrained by creatures I lacked any knowledge about. It was terrifying. So very, very terrifying...

The girl in a skirt, who had tossed me a stone before, stood before my eyes (my view sensor).

Even in a tiny form I could tell who she was.

No, truth was that I had known for a while.

I believed that my eyes had seen it. That her raw data had been stored in the short-term memory.

It was just that my subjectivity was so strong that I had not noticed.

Just like, at times, humans were able to suppress their anger or were unable to respond, I could still not fully dominate my restraining systems. But now, once my central integrated circuits had cooled off, it felt possible to make a correction and remove this *blurry mental image*.

If I integrated what the sensor arrays reported as observed data, a world without any filter whatsoever appeared before my eyes. A world that had to be beautiful.

The girl before my eyes I managed to acknowledge as a proper and real human female. It was proof that I was seeing a live image that was not being elaborated in any way.

My own self, which I believed human, also served as a cooperative correction that said that I was, in fact, as tall as a building. A self-deception function: Assistant-san had implemented it because it was his opinion that, without it, conflicts could arise...

Even with hands on her hips, and a figure that had to look up at a building, she was making an *I am very angry* face as she glared at me.

Her size was about one point seven meters, give or take. Awww...

I had patterned myself after the sole and only living being that I knew.

"S-..."

I bent the dozen or so legs I had, knelt before her and tipped myself forwards. I could not beg forgiveness properly when my domino-like body could not crawl on the floor. At least I could

make my head hang.
"SORRYYYYYY!"

...and that was how it went, hello, this is I (the real one).
Siiigh, how tired I am. It was draining. I thought I was going to die.
In part, there was something of a difference between the predicted psychological description of the Monument and the combination of my psychology with the monument going, *guess it's like this*.
If I was to guess about it, then I could speak of certain things.
To begin with, however, this was about the raising of an artificial intelligence.

> Will he become a new friend of humanity, which has always lived alone?
> It was with these lofty expectations that I activated this new version. And it happened immediately afterwards.

My apologies, that was only half in jest.
Of course I would have never thought that an artificial intelligence I merely trifled about with in my spare time would gain a soul.
Once fed up with just trifling around with it, I tried, last of all, adding to it a navigation program limited to the Office.
The instant a human-like limitation of freedom was installed on her, she rampaged.
When discussing this rampaging, / herself spoke so: "when I woke up, I felt like there were no humans whatsoever."
In other words, no matter how much she surveyed, there were no traces of humanity anywhere, that was what it meant.
When she woke up, suddenly there were no humans.
...what to compare that with, indeed. Perhaps to being assailed by an unease like being born and suddenly finding there was no one.
But, first of all, why could it not detect humans?
Human eyes could catch visible light, but could not detect the infrared.
Along those lines, it was thinkable that all that did not fit into similar intelligence as herself would have been filtered out.
Having just been born, of course, she was still nearly fully a machine. Assuming that, what happened is that she excluded all non-machine intelligence from her range of Potentially Intelligent.
Once investigated, the log for that day showed that this was because she could tell the definition of level of intelligence, but only in the domain of what was generated by herself, which had grown explosively in a short time and was, by then, a volume of data impossible to examine manually, making even an upstream search impossible.
Speaking truthfully, complaints from the farmers claiming that the monolith destroyed their house and stole materials: a single one.
Unable to appropriately comprehend other lives, she felt alone, left behind. And that was why she rampaged. Because she was scared.
Now then, as to why our confused monument, who was seemingly repulsed by the artificial, did to the Village. That, as well, was utter destruction as driven by feelings. Evacuation of the residents was managed at the very last second, but the scale was so overwhelming that there were people injured regardless.

And so it was that the spirit of a lion, ever sleeping but never able to stay silent, came out in the people.

It still remembers even now.

Among those depressed by the forceful evacuation, only Grandfather was grinning broadly. "If it's for the the Village, then there is nothing else to it: it has to be done. We, the Kusunoki Cannon Club, will give it all to help! Using that newly-acquired and very precious thing for this purpose makes our hearts pound tremendously fast, and it was in fact a waste to fire that cannon for official matters, but as long as it's for the sake of the Village, nothing less could be done to help the matter, I'd say."

The volley of the cannon, which had been restored to perfect condition, should have taken down the demon that destroyed the Village.

It was a nightmare.

In the very first fight, the tank won.

The cannon they were so proud of struck the monument accurately on the head, but its super-scientific materials showed their own strengths and the thing escaped destruction, instead it lost consciousness and just slammed down on the area instead. However, it regained consciousness right in the middle of being restrained, raged wildly, shredded off the chains, and ran away outside of the Village.

Grandfather and many figures among the Cultural Preservation Project said that the monument was dangerous and therefore needed to be destroyed. As there was opposition to this opinion, the conversation became confused. Hypothesizing that the location where the monument was to be installed would be its home position, the UN staff, in opposition, came to involve the residents of destroyed homes in their argument with Grandfather, and it ended in pandemonium.

Without that noise, I would have never been made to act in this situation, understand.

Whatever else, it was absolutely necessary for me to stop the Monument with my own hands.

After all, I was another of the people involved.

I would have done anything to avoid our last public, cooperative work marked as a failure, plus the destruction of an AI I went to great pains to raise, which would have ended all this as a *responsibility problem* with no openings for protests.

I had to access the monument, no matter the means.

As first-hand, direct access was much too dangerous, we tried persuading her via communicator circuits. The transmitted data was inspected by the AI, so restraining her from outside was impossible. But it could be used as a two-way means of communication, like a letter. We sent her my words, as translated to machine language, many times. Sad to say that, according to the monument herself, machine language was recognized in imperative form and extremely coercive, however, so our attempt at persuasion failed...

What happened after that you are aware of.

I, together with Assistant-san, Y, and a few others formed a search party, doing nothing but performing follow-up strikes on a fleeing the monument, a communication device in our arms. The monument frequently visited the Village in those times because it was fleeing the resistance by Grandfather and the black clothes. Because I tried to sneak in a self-cognizance that her self was human despite being as tall as a building, she could have used all the clever tricks in the world, the probability rate of her discovery would have always been one hundred percent.

After doing the same thing several times, 'I' lost her temper and made her base in the ruins outside of town, and even came to take up arms against us.

The monument came to attack the Village dressed prim and properly with a pink helmet and armor, and engaged in a third battle with Grandfather's tank. Immediately afterwards she protected Assistant-san, who was helping with the gathering of domestic animals, took a catapult hit to her forehead (?), and fell silent.

We believed her restrained firmly, but somehow she managed to escape. By the time she was rampaging in a rebuilding Village we caught up with her at last, and that was how it went.

No matter how resilient she was, once the fairies laid their hands on her she was all too easily apprehended, which was unexpected for me. I expected that she would resist more.

Wanting to know the reason for that, right after the thing had settled I froze the AI, with the intent of doing so only once, and tried examining her cognitive philosophy, but... there, I found a startling truth.

'I' had absolutely no cognizance of fairies.

It was a day to celebrate.

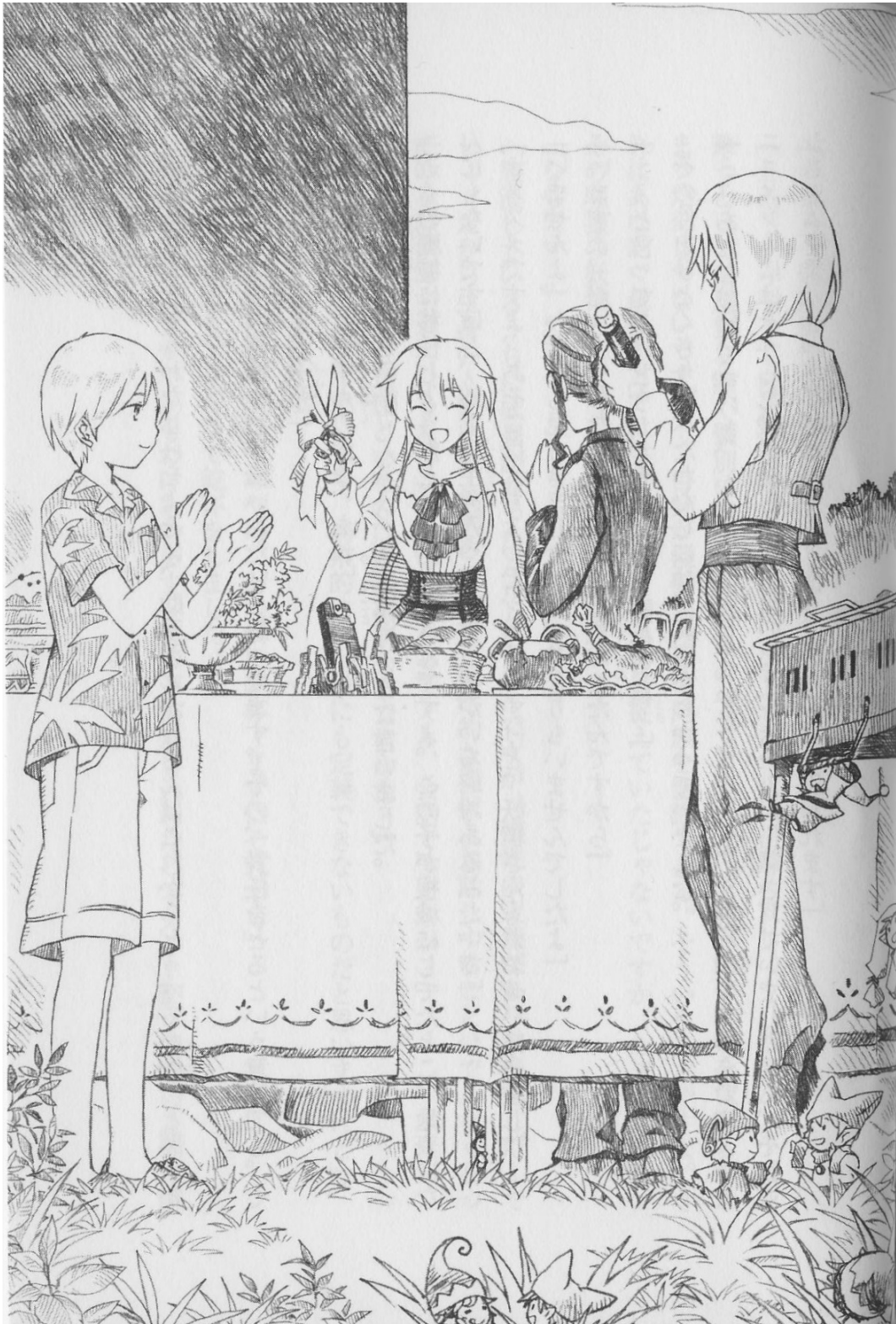
"Well then, I am going to cut, all right?"

Outdoors.

Something massive was covered by a white tarpaulin.

At its sides were three tables covered by white cloth, and while what had been laid on them was not that high-class, there were still warm meals and cold desserts that had had some work put to them.

And at their side, alone, stood the monument, except reduced, in miniature scale.



The miniature monument had begun playing what felt like a ceremonial suite from her speaker.

It was music from far in the past, we did not even know its name.

The presence of music of course made the mood different.

I cut the rope stretched out before me with scissors. The white cloth flapped down, and the towering monument appeared.

"There, it is finished!"

Clap-clap, clap.

There was a clapping scarce in density, one that could not fully fill the outdoors air.

It was initially expected for this to be a massive ceremony, but only a few of the people involved with it gathered on the day of the formal activation of the people's monument.

"That's it? No speech or nothin'?"

Y, champagne bottle in hand, said that with a face that said something was missing.

"Meaning I need to adhere to ceremonial practices in front of this number of people?"

The Monument's Activation Day Ceremony – participants: four.

I, Y, Assistant-san, and Agent K-san. In addition, fairies were playfully hanging around the stall we used for barbecue.

"Well then, allow me to say a few words of thanks. Guys, on this one we have reeeally made things worse."

Agent K bowed her head while putting significant stress on the word 'really'.

"We can at least be thankful that the work did not go to waste."

I gave a couple of pats at the dark, vertical construct.

After all those events, K-san and I went to great pains in order to persuade those that insisted that the monument had to be destroyed. Persuading victims and people with wrecked homes was no simple and easy thing, and the terms were that we had to remove the artificial intelligence as well as the leg unit from the monument, thus making it harmless, and that was how we managed to gain their permission at last.

"Quite a few people were involved, so whatever the form, it is a happy thing that we all managed to struggle all the way to installation.

The UN culture preservation project had with that day disbanded, and being perhaps more emotional about that than us others, Agent K was moved to tears behind her sunglasses.

"Well, there is no artificial intelligence, so it is nothing more than a mere hard disk."

It was a recording medium were a massive number of files had simply been stuffed in.

I suspect that, in the first place, the fairies who were assumed to be the first users of this thing would never bother with it. They did not consider help from humanity as necessary. Even acknowledging that, the people involved in its development were a little bit discouraged that they did not manage to make it usable.

"Ain't no mood to make merry at all, this. Well, I guess it's all right."

Y smiled sarcastically as she twisted the champagne's cork.

It popped off with a satisfying sound.

"C'mon, eat, drink. It's only the four of us, though."

Today we were going to have a BBQ party with only the four who had gathered here.

"'Only the four of us' is mean. There is one more here, see~?"

The celebratory music stopped as the miniature expressed her displeasure.

That is correct.

That was 'I'.

We ported her.

With stable stretches of her spider-like legs, PocMon (from Pocket Monument) was making motions that felt like an alien's as she walked around the top of the table.

"AI discrimination ostracized. Please count me as one of you, as well!"

"...proud, ain't she."

"...she is, truly. Despite all the help she needed..."

"C-, come now, come now, the both of you...!"

"Are you listening? You, well, if you get discovered by the guys in the Village, I would not be bothered even if you were deleted, you see? Do you understand?"

"I am very grateful, ma'am."

"Goody."

Perhaps she was using my personality as base, because she was just a little bit rude. Being that I was going to be the same, she was cynical with me. It was that hatred children had for parents who were too similar to them, you see.

"Well, in a body like this you can't really make much of a mess," went Y.

Beeep, went something.

"What is this sound?"

"Emergency, my batteries are about to be exhausted. To the charging base, please, the charging base!"

Ever attentive, Assistant-san had brought the electrical charging base. We were all being attentive here, since a mere machine could go charge off in some tent or something instead of staying with all of us.

She was put in a bookstand with a socket set into it, it was a hastily constructed charger.

PocMon sat down on it with the same fluster as a human who needed to go to the toilet in a hurry. Then relaxed. Exactly like with a toilet.

"Seriously..."

"What're we gonna do with this thing?"

K-san snapped her hand up at Y's question.

"If it's fine with you two, I'd like to take her in. Er, as a memento. But if there's anyone else who really wants her, then..."

There were none, none, none.

Us three, K-san excluded, shook our heads at precisely the same moment.

"After all, that thing's got a bad personality."

"Hey!"

"Shut it, you."

Ignoring how we were poking at each other, Assistant-san asked what K-san was going to do next.

"I believe I will help with the rebuilding of the Village, for a while. That... also implies I'm taking responsibility. After that, well... it's undecided."

"Rebuilding the Village... how're you even gonna do that?"

Y helped herself to another gulp of champagne as she asked that like the matter did not concern her.

"I heard rumors that people were moving to the ruins nearby. The area that the girl there had rebuilt into a fortress. There's nothing whatsoever on the surface, but it seem that there's some many facilities still asleep underground."

PocMon answered, "that would be my recommendation, yes, right there. They're a bit shy, but there's a lot of fairies there."

"There were very much not. When I went to look, there was not a single one."

"There so were. After all, they helped me."

"...and that is that. Well? What do you say, Mediator-sama?"

Having investigated with accuracy that matter, I knew the truth.

"...that may be a ruin, but there were several systems that just barely managed to preserve themselves, you see. Since the Monument was equipped with a system that could suck out information from those, it appears that all that happened was that their systems were overtaken and worked as her extra limbs."

"In other words, they were remote controlled?," went K-san.

"Correct. Doing so she was able to repair herself, to perform maintenance, to say it. And taking over the remaining systems and getting them to work required a fictional image, one to separate them from the self, and so, why not fairies? Being an artificial intelligence, yourself, means you recognize those of the same family. That was what happened. At this point, however, I believe that the 'fairies' of that place will never show up again."

"Why?," went PocMon.

"I do believe that there has been some growth while you were wandering, however, your definition of intelligence has solidified even further. Therefore, now that your focus is on flesh-and-blood humans, you should be incapable of speaking to primitive machines. For example, are you able to converse with *these* ones around us?"

"...I can't. That's because intelligence is based on its definition, right?"

"That is the core of the matter. I do not believe that is something that, properly speaking, anyone can define."

I see, and 'I' sunk in silence.

"Drop it with the talking shop during a party, drop it! First, a toast. That's what goes first."

Y took the lead and we all said cheers.

We ate the food and portioned the desserts. The biscuits offered as provisions below the table disappeared like magic.

"Say, if you please, could you tell me why you misperceived yourself as me?"

I suddenly came out with a question that was on my mind, and this caused 'I' a five seconds processing lag (she was deep in thought).

"...maybe because, to the 'me' that I used to be, you were the sole and only existence I could feel, wouldn't that be that?"

"But I do not believe you could have seen me at that point, correct?"

"Even without seeing you, I felt your presence... maybe."

I was not my intent for her to imitate the real person that I was. It was simply difficult to impress a young self-deprived AI the distinction between the self and others.

And now, even without being able to view her own figure, it was not like she could not still imitate me, the original person who provided her with inputs.

"I see. You looked in the mirror and made a cut-and-paste, then."

"...maybe I envied you. You can interact with humans and fairies."

"Meaning you were lonely?"

"Yes."

"And now?"

"Right now, not so much. There' so many humans, what a relief."

"There are many, many, many more. The ones under the table, for example."

"Do fairies really exist?," she asked.

"They really do!"

Since she could not see them, I asserted that in her stead.

They were still there, at our feet.

"...that's so nice. I wish I could see them as live data."

That would have maybe been a difficult thing to do.

I started feeling something like pity for her.

I gently stroked the PocMon. And then told her this.

"Though you can't see them, they truly do exist. Eventually you will brush past each other, making direct contact. They are very spirited next-door neighbors, you know! As long as you do not forget those feelings, you will never experience loneliness. That is because fairies that exist only for your sake will dwell in your heart and—"

"What is even that? LOL."

My finger flicked to her forehead toppled the domino-like PocMon.

Fairy Memo - PocMon

Pocket Monument alias PocMon.

As per the alterations performed to the technical specifications of the People's Monument, the intelligence circuits were removed and installed within a small-scale storage device thinkable as a mascot.

In the sense that it's a device that walks where it wants it's the same as the previous, giant monument, but compared to the original, only the minimal and the more shoddily-made among systems of that original (such as sensors) could not be removed.

The AI asserts that she has a soul, but I wonder...

As an aside, it seems that PocMon is unable to see fairies.

What a mystery.



Periodic Report - Spring

1. First Half

In recent years, the number of residents transferring in due to the UN's cultural works or simply moving in from neighboring villages has created a trend of increase in population, however, it was the number of children moving in that was startling. Requests for private schooling began coming in, and as the result of an inquiry, it was decided that the UN Mediation Committee would experimentally open a school on its premises.

The educators were a rotation of personnel and residents who volunteered, meaning that as a school it had a simple form, but it was regardless able to welcome three children, improving their scholastic basics while at the same time working to cultivate their moral fiber.

Also, with regards to the problems of many families where the houses are vacated due to work, such as farming, it is also true that their children were not receiving adequate supervision, meaning that of course a school is perceived as providing a visible level of results.

Higher education had with that finished its course, however it's thinkable that the educational basics put out by a school on this small a scale could provide an educational standard even going forwards.

Also, in the same period, extremely rare insects were occasionally spotted around Kusunoki Village, and at the same time, reports were coming in about a new species of cockroach. Remarkably rare, these insects came to be called Black Cubic Cockroaches, and a small number of them are at present held in the house of an insect collector.

2. Second Half

Spearheaded by the UN's acculturation activities, construction on the People's Monument had lasted a long time, but in the end, the first of its kind had been set up. It's expected it will be in proper working condition after one year of testing.

It may be said that in the first two weeks of operation there was no trouble of any kind. There were some malfunctions when the self-moving test was being carried out, but that was the extent of what happened.

As it was installed with the premise that it will be used for a long time hence, at present time there seem to be components that had not been installed, but it is planned that version upgrades will be performed.

Another large-scale city ruin has been discovered neighboring Kusunoki Village.

The majority of the overland buildings had been destroyed, but it has been established that the majority of of underground facilities has been preserved in unexpectedly good condition. There is a high probability that substances that can be re-used will be found.

Further investigations are expected.

(Follows: a private message appended by the employee)

Even this time I wrote, as per directions of the bureau chief, something along the lines that "nothing has happened".

The true course of events is as below.

○○/xx, △△:△△ Monument begins motions.

The education given her by her educators is carried out with zeal.

○○/xx, △△:△△ Monument rampages (self-propulsion becomes uncontrollable).

Whole of Kusunoki Village alerted, evacuation begins.

The Mediation Committee, together with the cultural preservation staff, forms an Emergency Response Team.

They engage in the jobs of repulsion and capture of the Monument at the exclusion of all else.

○○/xx, △△:△△ Damage to the Kusunoki Village buildings totals 97%.

○○/xx Reports come that the Monument is prowling nearby areas.

○○/xx Reports have been filed that the Monument was attacking family homes, stealing batteries and machinery. ※During all this, volunteers have attempted many times to use the Monument's communication circuits to restrain it, but they were rejected in the end and the attempts failed.

○○/xx We lose all location data on the Monument. However, we had repeated reports from eyewitnesses of having seen the Monument briefly approaching various surrounding ruins and doing something like collecting data. It is thought that the Monument's ancestral objective of collecting data had become instinctive.

○○/xx The Monument attacked the village. Repelled by the Emergency Response Team.

○○/xx Attacks – multiple.

○○/xx The result of tracking the fleeing Monument was the conclusion that it had made a nest in city ruins forty kilometers from the Village. Considering the Monument's moving speed, it had to be a distance of about an hour.

※It became clear with later investigations that the Monument had accessed a group of systems that had survived in standby, and planned to employ them to upgrade itself. The access rights that the Monument had been granted towards these past systems were elevated, and with the appropriate means it could infiltrate them, and it was likely it could use these surviving systems to their fullest extents.

○○/xx The Monument attacked the village and was successfully captured.

※At the time, the Monument seemed to be in a state of mental confusion, and there are sworn statements that report a necessity to investigate the Monument itself in order to regain its memories.

○○/xx With the artificial intelligence module now removed, the Monument is installed as a mere storage device.

That concludes the report.

The Village is currently being rebuilt, but as the damage is thorough, and furthermore rumors easily spread to other areas, the full support of the UN will be required. If food, clothing, and other necessities were distributed in abundance, it is maybe possible that it would seal people's mouths.

Afterword

This is Romeo Tanaka. It's been a while, how have you all been?

That may have come out of nowhere, but being an adult means that not seeing friends every day is nothing to be sad about. That might sound worrisome to all you students out there. Adults, instead, welcome with warmth a friend that they haven't seen for a while. You invite them into your castle (premise: aristocrat) and drink in abundance before the hearth as you cheerfully talk about the past. Leisure time spent like that could truly be said to be the privilege of adults. For example, friendship has never been found hurt by a first meeting after many years. It's this calm connection, this mature friendship, that is the Cool Style of adults. By the same reasoning, plenty of time has passed since the first publishing of the sixth volume of Jintai¹, so I would like this to be welcomed in particular by you all middle-aged male readers.

Recently, an acquaintance told me that all my fans were middle-aged men, so here's a surprised Tanaka.

Now then, this has nothing to do with those reading about a year later after buying it from a used book store, but up next for Humanity Has Declined is being turned into moving pictures. Don't get all excited, it's not a movie of the likes that you can illegally upload to the Internet. Yes, you're right.

It will be an anime.

"Weird." "That's not like Romeo Tanaka at all." "You're the kind who has things go splat partway through, don't you!" "Ain't you making this sound too good to be true?" "It's a trap!" "Did someone just set the flag for the world being destroyed the day before broadcast?", that is what the middle-aged males would think. I'm of the same opinion. It's just, well, this seems to be real. It doesn't look like the world will be ending this year.

Starting July 2012, many broadcasters, such as Chiba TV, should begin transmitting it. I think the details will probably be printed on the obi, so please ensure to check them out.

Even I'm currently excited to see, as a viewer, what the staff as a whole will make out of these books.

♪Current Events Corner♪

Write about your current personal events in the afterwords, I was requested, and so I will. Nothing whatsoever. It was all work.

Sleep wake up work sleep with no breaks for going outside, that's the cycle that's been repeating for several weeks now. Leaving the house happens on schedule once a week to buy foodstuff. I thought I might die. Although it was a period of time where all sorts of work piled on all sorts of work, I still rode my body hard. I love myself very much. That's why my heart hurts. O body of mine, I'm never gonna make you feel suffering. I will protect you (by skipping out on work)...

By the way, of late, whenever I call the parameters window the sub-screens are all how they were from the room's previous occupant (native Indian). Hah hah.

Of course, even with I being I, being cooped up for several weeks makes me go all weird in the head. Depending on when work ends, I think I might run outside naked. It would be the beginning of a voyage with no goal. All you middle-aged male readers around Akabane,

¹ Almost two years.

Ikebukuro, or Komagome, let's you all go to some bar that that famous bar critic Yoshida Rui would introduce us on TV at-random and have near-misses with me! (Meaning your communication with me will be you brushing past me.)
By the way, walking back to my house in Komagome deep in the night, late after the last train, from Ikebukuro/Akabane , has happened often in Tanaka's history (4-5 hours of racewalking).

This is an unofficial fan translation. Please support any official release.